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No. 52.

Dick Lighthouse's Trials.

A SEQUEL TO DICK LIGHTHEART.

CHAPTER I.

RAISING THE WIND.

THE next day, in the play-hour, Dick got hold of the servant, Sam Fuggles, who cleaned the boots, knives, &c., and waited on table.

"Won't there be a pretty shine if you're cotched, sir?"

"But I don't mean to be. Shove up," replied Dick. The next moment he vaulted gracefully over the wall and descended at the feet of Henrietta and his sister Emily.

"Oh, Dick!" they cried in a breath. "How could you. If we're seen, we shall be sent to bed without any dinner."

"All the better for your health, my little dears," answered Dick, adding, "Give me a kiss, Emmy."

"I shall not do anything of the sort," replied Emily. "Harry will, then."

"What?" asked Emily.

"Have you girls got any money?"

"I haven't: Henrietta's got a sovereign, though, she was going to buy something with."

"That's your sort. Lend it me, Harry dear, and look sharp, or we shall have old Mother Frump after us."

"Don't you lend it him. He never pays back again," exclaimed Emily.

"Oh, you base girl," replied Dick, with affected indignation. "What do you deserve? Go, degenerate child, and—say your prayers."

The girls laughed.



Snarley, awakened by the terrible din, poked his head through the curtain, and gazed in dismay at the chaos in the room.

"Sam," he said, "look over the wall for me and tell me if the old dragon's about."

Sam did so, and coming down, reported the coast clear.

"There ain't no Miss Bodmin about, sir," he said. "But the young ladies is a-skiping and a-playing like so many lambs."

"All right," replied Dick. "Give us a leg up. I'm going over."

"No, I shall not either," answered Henrietta.

"You know we're engaged, Harry dear. So you might as well."

"It would look so; all the other girls will see," replied Henrietta.

"Let them; they'll only be envious and wish they had the same chance. Never mind, if you won't I can't help it. I'll fancy it done, and that's the next best thing. But I say I want something."

"I haven't got it here," said Henrietta; "it's upstairs in my work-box."

"Get it. Wrap it up in paper, and throw it over the wall."

"How shall I know you've got it?"

"I'll sing 'Bonnie Dundee' when I have it, and you'll know it has been safely landed," replied Dick.

"Run, Dick, the door is opening. It's Miss Bodmin," cried Emily.

"I'm off. Bless you, my children," answered Dick, climbing up a fruit tree, and regaining his own playground before he was observed.

In ten minutes a piece of paper came over the wall, Dick saying, "Dundee, he is mounted, he rides up the street."

He was happy, for the money was coming in, and he was sure of his expenses on the ensuing Monday.

Starting off to look for Messiter, he did not see Cocky Armond who was playing at marbles, and the consequence was he tumbled over him.

"This won't do, Cocky," he exclaimed.

"Why don't you look where you are coming to?" responded Armond.

Dick kicked the marbles out of the ring.

"Can you oblige me with some tripe," he said, "or a cow heel?"

"I daresay you think it very funny to chaff me about what some one told you my father is, but it's not true. He isn't a tripe-dresser," said Armond, flushing angrily.

"Perhaps he can cut a rope."

"I'll tell you what I can do. I can hit you in the eye."

As he spoke he struck out at Dick, who stepped back.

"You didn't do it, my boy," he said with a provoking sneer. "Try again."

"What's the row?" asked Messiter and Fowler coming up.

"Why Armond's going to give Lighthouse a thrashing for cheeking him," exclaimed Conolly, who was an Armondite.

"Perhaps you'd like one yourself," said Fowler.

"You can't give it me."

In an instant, Conolly and Fowler were fighting, and Dick and Armond also came to close quarters.

"Row, row!" cried Fowler. "Lighthears to the rescue!"

"A mill, a mill!" exclaimed Gordon, a boy about Fowler's age; "Armondites! Armondites! Mill! mill!"

"Mind your eye," said Fowler, as he rolled his antagonist over.

In a moment, boys came up from all parts of the playground.

The long pending battle-royal between the two factions had broken out at last, and through an accident, as is the nature of such things.

CHAPTER II.

ARMONDITES AND LIGHTHEARTS.

"Come on, my boys. Who cut the rope? Pitch into the tripe and cow heel," shouted Dick.

The rival parties took up the cry of "Who cut the rope?" and the battle became general.

Brabazon and Chapman ranged themselves on Dick's side as they were devoted Lighthears.

In five minutes the Armondites were getting the worst of it.

They retreated to the school-room door, and there made a stand.

Dick rushed in at Armond, who was fighting well. He succeeded in catching him round the neck.

"Now Cocky," he said, "how do you find yourself now I've put the hug on?"

Armond was in chancery, and a shower of blows coming down upon his face like rain, gave him a confused idea of things in general.

Armond contrived to wriggle himself out of Dick's grasp and fell to the ground, where he lay still, not attempting to renew the combat.

His followers rallied round his body, and made a desperate struggle to drive back their assailants.

At this moment Mr. Simcox, who had been alarmed by the noise, rushed into the playground.

A melancholy spectacle of black eyes, cut lips, and bleeding noses met his astonished gaze.

"Boys, boys!" he exclaimed in his most awful voice, "what is this?"

Dick was in the act of pitching into a big boy when the sound reached him.

Everyone desisted, as if by magic.

"Please, sir," said Dick, coming forward with an eye that was beginning to close, and a mouth that had already swollen, "it's a new game."

"A what?" demanded the head master.

"A new game, sir. We call it Armondites and Lighthears, but we lost our tempers, sir, and hit too hard."

"How do you play it?"

"Armond and I toss up to choose sides, sir, and then his men and my men try to catch each other. Just like prisoner's base, but we lost our tempers, as I said, and some of us got intoreal instead of sham fighting."

Mr. Simcox was only half convinced.

"It is a bad sort of game," he said, "and I forbid you to play it again. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir," replied Dick.

"And to show my sense of displeasure, I shall not allow you to go on the beach or out of the house—none of you, mind, until next week. Half of you are not fit to be seen—go and wash your faces; it is nearly dinner time. Get out of my sight, do. I'm ashamed of you, and let me hear no more of Armondites and Lighthears," said Mr. Simcox.

Armond had risen to his feet, and looked a deplorable spectacle.

Dick had punished him severely.

"Armond," exclaimed the professor, "you should have known better than to engage in sport of this kind. Bless me, what a sight you are."

"He provoked me to fight him, sir," replied Armond.

"Who did?"

"Lighthouse."

"Well, well! Shake hands and be friends! There! Make it up," said Mr. Simcox, "and let me hear no more of it."

"I don't mind, sir. Here is my hand, Lighthouse, if you like to take it," exclaimed Armond.

"Thank you, no. I don't mind shaking hands with

a sweep or a crossing-sweeper, if he's honest; but I must decline the honor on the present occasion," replied Dick, stiffly.

"What's the cause of this feud between Armond and yourself?" inquired Mr. Simcox.

"He tried to kill me at the gymnasium, sir. You know the story."

"Ah, ah!" exclaimed Mr. Simcox. "That is a disputed point. He accuses you, and you accuse him, when, after all, it may have been the fault of an old rope."

"It is too bad of Lighthouse to try and injure me again by speaking ill of me!" exclaimed Armond. "He knows very well he cut the rope; but I forgive him, and I should only feel annoyed if he misled you, sir."

"A truly Christian spirit. Very good. I commend you, Armond. Now run and wash your face. This must not occur again. You know the high opinion I have of you, Armond."

"Thank you, sir."

"If you are set upon again, call me."

"I will, sir."

"Do not lower yourself by fighting like a blackguard. Call me. I am head master in this school, and you shall see that I will maintain my authority."

Bending a fierce look upon Dick, the professor strode away, leaving Armond the master of the situation.

"You're a nice, whining, hypocritical sort of cur," said Dick; "and, if I had not given you such a hiding, I should feel tempted to soil my hands once more with your ugly mug."

"It will be best for you, Lighthouse, to keep quiet. You heard what Mr. Simcox said," answered Armond.

"Get out," continued Dick; "get out of my sight, or, upon my soul, I shall kick you."

Armond thought it advisable to go away, which he did, with a pious snuffle.

But in his heart, the vengeance and hatred that had been for a long time gathering against Dick, increased tremendously.

"He's my enemy," thought Dick; "and anything I can say or do, won't make him hate me less."

The Lighthears had given the Armondites a thorough thrashing, as the bruised faces at the dinner-table sufficiently testified.

The masters were greatly shocked and scandalized, but as the whole school was to blame, they couldn't punish so many.

Owing to Dick's clever excuse, not even the ring-leaders were singled out.

But pains and penalties were threatened if it happened again.

Even the Honorable Brabazon put his gentility on one side, and received a black eye.

Dick and Messiter were both knocked about, and they tried everything they could think of to get their faces well by Monday.

It was the day of the *fete*, when their great scheme was to be put into execution.

As the time drew near, their hearts beat high.

Dick prepared the letter in imitation of his father's handwriting, and kept it in his desk.

It was his intention to slip it into the letter-box on Monday morning early.

This would make it appear that a servant had brought it from the Bedford Hotel, and had left it, not thinking an answer was necessary.

CHAPTER III.

THE "GYM" AT WORK.

On Saturday, Mr. Snarley was in a very good temper. He went out with the boys to the cricket-field, and condescended to take an innings, making the wonderful score of 0.

He was loudly cheered when he took his bat back to the tent, where Messiter was scoring.

"Got a duck, sir?" said Messiter, grinning.

"As you say, Messiter," he replied, "put me down a duck's egg. I have obtained a cypher. It is the fortune of war. Make a little room on that bench, please. I am inclined to sit down, and have no wish to exert myself much, as on Monday I go out."

"Go out, sir?"

"Yes. It is what I call my holiday. I have asked for a day, and Mr. Simcox has kindly given me one."

"What shall you do, sir?" asked Messiter.

He thought of his intended outing with Dick, and hoped sincerely that Mr. Snarley would not go in any direction where he might meet with him.

"Unfortunately," replied Mr. Snarley, "my friends live in Gloucestershire, so that I shall not be able to see them. I see a *fete* advertised at the Swiss Gardens, Shoreham. Probably I may take a trip down there."

"Oh! I wouldn't go there, sir," said Messiter, quickly.

"And why not?"

"Awfully slow; wouldn't interest you, sir. It's a pleasure garden. I went there once, and didn't care for it at all."

"Well, do we not want pleasure and relaxation when we take a holiday?" said Mr. Snarley. "If the bow is always bent, what happens?"

"It breaks."

"Of course it does. Therefore we must occasionally unstring it. I am decidedly in favor of going into the Swiss Gardens. There will be singing in the theater. I saw the name of Miss Mountserratt in the bills, and Mr. Slocum, who has seen her, thinks her very nice."

"Dick's Polly," thought Messiter.

"And now let us improve the occasion," continued Mr. Snarley. "In the intervals of scoring you can answer me questions in Scripture history, in which you are very backward, and if you do not improve you will never pass your examination."

Messiter groaned inwardly.

"Tell me now," said Mr. Snarley, "who was the most merciful man in the Bible?"

"Merciful man, sir?—Og."

"Og! Who's Og?"

"Og, the King of Bashan, sir, for his mercy endureth forever," said Messiter.

"Absurd. You have made a mistake; that phrase, which continually occurs in one of the Psalms, has no connection with Og."

Fortunately for Messiter, it was his turn to go in; and, being called by the captain of his eleven, he made his escape from Mr. Snarley, much to his delight.

When the stumps were drawn and the boys were going home, Messiter communicated his news to Dick.

"Snarley's got a day out," he said.

"Well, what of it?" replied Dick.

"He's going to moon about in Brighton."

"All the better."

"He's seen the advertisement of the *fete* at the Swiss Gardens, and thinks of going there to see Miss Agatha Mountserratt, about whom old Slocum raves and says he's awfully spooney."

"What, my Polly! Slocum spoons on my Polly!" exclaimed Dick, indignantly.

"You've got Henrietta. You don't want two."

"I don't know. Variety is always charming," said Dick, carelessly. "Suppose Henrietta lets me down, I can fall back on Polly, and vice versa."

He did not like the idea, however, of Snarley going to Shoreham.

"Didn't you try to choke him off when he told you?" he asked.

"Yes, rather," replied Messiter. "I said I had heard it was not the sort of place to suit him."

"It's too good for him," replied Dick. "But I'll tell you what we'll do, if he does go."

"What?"

"We'll get old Hopkins, that's Polly's father, you know, to help us, and we'll capture Snarley and put him in a caravan, and make him the wild man of the woods, and show him at a penny a head."

"Oh, Dick," said Messiter.

"Do you think I wouldn't do it?" Dick asked.

"Not for a moment. You always do a thing if you say you will."

"He shall be the natural phenomenon, or wild man of the woods, I tell you, caught in his native forests, somewhere up South America way. He has eaten more men than he can digest, and his temper has become worse in consequence!"

"Won't it be splendid!" exclaimed Messiter.

"They were walking behind the other boys, who were hastening home, carrying bats, balls, stumps, pads and other things they had taken with them."

Suddenly a man who leant on a stick as he walked, touched Lighthouse on the shoulder.

"Hallo! what's your game?" cried Dick.

"Don't you know me?" said the man.

"Hanged if I do! Yet, stop a bit; I've seen you somewhere."

Dick tapped his forehead, as if he was trying to remember.

"I was at Mohammed's place, in Castle Square."

"Of course; you're the gym. You're the attendant—name of Jackson—I know you now; glad to see you about again, my dear fellow, heartily glad!" said Dick, shaking his proffered hand cordially.

The gymnasium attendant smiled, and replied:

"I am the gym, as you call me, and I'm pleased to think I'm getting along so well. My injuries are much less severe than I suspected."

"It's a pleasure to me to see you," continued Dick, because your speaking to me proves that you don't really think that I did the dirty, shabby trick which laid you up."

"I know you didn't," replied Jackson.

"You can't know it for a fact, but you feel positive it was Armond. Is that it?"

"That's it," answered the gym, "and I have to thank you all for your kind subscriptions. I'm not well off, and my friends are poor. My illness would have been a serious blow if I had not had some money."

"If you want any more I've got some loose cash, old fellow, and you're welcome to it. Perhaps it will do you as much good as *Oko Jumbo*."

Jackson smiled at this remark, though he did not see the joke, and answered:

"Thank you, I'm all right at present. But I wanted to see you to tell you that I have been thinking a good deal while I lay on my sick bed, and I'm determined to punish Mr. Armond for being the cause of my accident."

"He meant the trap for me," replied Dick.

"I know he meant the trap for you," said Jackson, "but I fell into it. You, too, have fallen in the estimation of your companions, for he has circulated the most infamous reports about you behind your back."

"He can't hurt me," replied Dick. "My friends don't believe him, and he'll be found out some day."

"He's a villain, and you ought to be on your guard, Mr. Lighthouse," continued the gym. "A fellow who could coolly and deliberately do a thing like that, would do something much worse. He'll have another shy at you."

"Think so?" replied Dick.

"I'm sure of it. However, I'm at work, and if I can bowl him out, I will. I suppose your masters would not keep him in the school if it was proved that he had actually committed such a crime. I may call it a crime, because it might have killed you, and very nearly did me."

"I don't know. They might keep him," replied Dick.

"I may be wrong, and I may be right, sir," replied the attendant at the gymnasium, "about my expectation of finding him out. One thing I know I'm right about, and that is your innocence."

"Wire in," said Dick, "I wish you luck, and if ever you're hard up for a pound, come to me, and if I haven't got it, I'll get up a subscription for you. I'm wonderful at getting up subs, ain't I, Harry?"

Messiter laughed, and replied in the affirmative.

He shook hands with Jackson, as they were nearly home and said:

"I can't ask you in, as it isn't my own house, you understand; and I can't ask you to have a drink either, because our usher would drop down upon me. So you must take the will for the deed. You meet me when I'm out on the loose, and see if I won't do what's proper and handsome."

Jackson declared that he wanted nothing but his friendship and good will, and walked back again.

"That gym is a good sort," remarked Messiter.

"First-class," replied Dick. "I'm awfully pleased he doesn't think I cut the rope, and I hope he will find Armond out. For although Mr. Simcox has not accused me of doing it, more from want of evidence and proof than any feeling of good-will, he and several others believe me guilty."

"Give a dog a bad name and hang him," said Messiter.

"You mean that I have got the reputation of being a scapegrace, and on that account everything that is bad and suspicious is put down to me."

"Live it down."

"I've a good mind to turn missionary," said Dick, "and go out myself to Oko Jumbo."

Messiter laughed at this, and said he thought he would soon wish himself back again.

When Monday came, they were glad to see that the bruises they had received in the fight between the Armondites and Lighthearts had disappeared, so that they could appear in public with a presentable appearance.

Early in the morning, Dick slipped the letter he had written in his father's handwriting into the letter-box. With a beating heart he waited the result.

CHAPTER IV.

OFF ON THE SPREE.

It was half-past nine when Sam Fuggles, the servant, came into the playground where the boys were amusing themselves before ten o'clock school.

"Master Lightheart, sir," he said.

"What is it, Sam?" replied Dick.

"Governor wants you at once."

"Coming, Sam," said Dick.

He guessed what he was wanted for and felt sure that his clever, if not strictly honest, device was already as good as successful.

Mr. Simcox was in his study, the remains of a substantial breakfast were upon the table, and he was reading a morning paper, while he indulged in his early pipe, for smoking was one of his pet weaknesses.

"Oh! Lightheart," said Mr. Simcox, "your father has arrived in Brighton for a day or two, and wishes you to spend a few hours with him."

"Has he been here, sir?" asked Dick, innocently.

"No, he has written."

"May I go, sir?"

"You may," replied the professor. "Your conduct has improved lately, and I gladly give you the holiday for which your respected father asks in his note."

As a matter of fact, Dick had not greatly improved, but he had not been found out so frequently of late.

"Thank you, sir," he said.

"Oh! and you may take your friend Messiter with you. The Rev. Mr. Lightheart mentions his name, and prefers a request to that effect," continued the professor.

"Very well, sir, I will tell him."

"You can start as soon as you like, and you must be home by ten o'clock, if not before."

Dick promised to remember this, and, wild with delight, went to seek Messiter, to whom he communicated the good news.

They went to their dormitory and quickly changed their clothes.

Each wore a hat and put on lavender-colored gloves, and carried a small cane in his hand.

"Oh! my; you are toffs," said Sam, as he saw them going out.

"We mean it this time, Sam," replied Dick.

"If you young gents ain't up to mischief, I'm mistaken."

"Not we, Sam; we're too quiet and innocent," Dick said, with a wink.

"Yes, you are—over the left," replied Sam, grinning.

"Has Snarley gone?"

"This hour or more, sir. He don't often have a day out, and when he does, he likes to make the most of it."

"Perhaps he'll never come back. I had a bad dream about him," said Dick.

"Now I know there's something on," exclaimed Sam. "Oh, Master Lightheart, you are a born imp for mischief."

"Shut up, Sam, you are becoming familiar. Learn how to treat your superiors with proper respect. I shall have to complain to Mr. Simcox of your unseemly behavior," replied Dick, with mock gravity.

Sam burst out laughing as the boys started on their journey.

"Going to see his father, Master Messiter said," remarked Sam between explosive bursts of laughter. "So am I going to see my father. There's a game on. Oh, he is a treat, that young Lightheart. See his father! So I should think."

As they walked along the Parade, Dick began to sing, "Off on the spree, boys, off on the spree; we'll have a day, boys, down by the sea. Strike up, Harry, you're not half a cock."

Then he went on, humming gayly:

"Shoreham Gardens, have you ever been there? Such tricks, picnics, as are only seen there."

Laughing and talking, they went to the railway station, where they took first-class return tickets for Shoreham.

The train started almost directly, and it was about

half-past eleven when they found themselves at the entrance of the Swiss Gardens, and gained admission by payment of one shilling.

They went into the beautiful grounds, and admired the lovely autumn flowers and the various buildings, chiefly made of wood in the Swiss style, and the winding paths, with quaint little bridges over the water, and after they had gone everywhere, they stopped in front of an inclosure where a large balloon lay safely at its moorings.

"Pull up here," said Dick.

The balloon was to ascend in the afternoon, under the skillful guidance of its owner; the car was attached, and seemed capable of holding four people.

At one side of the big balloon, which was called the Montgolfier, were half a dozen small pilot balloons.

Suddenly Messiter said:

"There's a pretty girl, Dick."

A glance in the direction indicated by Messiter showed him that it was Miss Agatha Mountserratt, otherwise Polly.

Dick was going up to speak to her, when he beheld a gentleman shuffling after her, as she strolled slowly along.

This was Mr. Snarley.

There was no mistake about it.

He had got himself up in a white hat, a blue silk necktie, and yellow-looking gloves, all of which made his rather ungainly figure and features the more striking.

Pulling Messiter's arm, Dick withdrew behind a shrub, saying:

"It won't do to let him see us at present, as it would spoil all our fun."

"So it would," answered Messiter. "What a nuisance he should come here."

"It's a bore; but we'll send him home."

"How?"

"Oh! half-drown him or something," replied Dick, adding: "Look, he's speaking to Polly."

"Is that your Polly?"

"Yes. Isn't she pretty?" said Dick.

"I should think she was, too," replied Messiter, with enthusiasm.

Mr. Snarley made bold to address Polly, close to where the boys were concealed.

"Ah! pardon me, my young lady!" he said. "I—I have an appreciation of—ahem!—talent, and—and I have been given to understand that you are—ahem!—Miss Agatha Mountserratt."

"That's my name, sir," replied the divine Polly, regarding the strange, scarecrow-like figure before her with considerable amusement.

"Ah, thank you," he continued. "May I—ahem!—if it is not too early in the morning, invite you to—to partake of a glass—ahem!—of sherry, say sherry wine?"

"No, I am obliged to you; another time," she replied.

"At least allow me to walk by your side while you promenade the lovely gardens."

"Sir," said Polly.

Dick turned to Messiter, and said:

"I can't stand this! stay where you are."

He had drawn a small fish-hook from his pocket, in which he generally kept a little arsenal of all the things a schoolboy may or may not want.

With wonderful rapidity he cut the rope of one of the small pilot balloons, and attached the gut of his fish-hook to the end of the string.

Then he crept across the path, till he got behind Snarley, and contrived to stick the hook in the rim of his hat.

The balloon caught a breath of air.

There was a tug, and away went Snarley's new white hat, sailing gayly over the garden towards the pathless sea.

His bald head was revealed in all its shininess.

Dick retreated, and joined Messiter again.

Mr. Snarley uttered a dismal shriek, and said:

"My hat; oh! my hat. Fit for the races. This style ten-and-six. Halt a-guinea gone at one swoop, and I am bare-headed; but how the dickens did it go?"

Polly laughed, and though she had not been inclined to speak to him a minute ago, she now said:

"The pilot balloon must have broken loose, and somehow it caught your hat."

Mr. Snarley at a little distance beheld a shooting gallery.

To rush to it and snatch up a rifle did not take him long.

Leveling the gun at the runaway balloon, he fired and missed.

"Good idea, sir," exclaimed the proprietor of the gallery, "but a bad shot. You'll never hit it; your hand shakes too much."

"Do you try; a shilling for your trouble."

"Spring a bob, sir. Make it a florin."

"Fire, fire, or it will go out to sea, and become the prey of some rascally Frenchman. Don't waste precious time in talking," shrieked Mr. Snarley.

The man ran down the path after the balloon and fired, once, twice, thrice. The third shot hit the side, the air rushed out, and as the prepared paper collapsed, the hat descended with a run.

But not on the solid ground.

It fell on the lake, and began to float round and round in a graceful manner.

"I should like to throw a brick at it," said Dick.

He ran down to the side of the lake, followed by Messiter, and saw a boat moored to the bank.

A written notice stuck on the boughs informed him that it was "For the use of visitors. N. B.—Don't pull up the plug in the stern, which is to let out the water when she leaks, and has been beached in consequence."

This was enough for Dick.

He jumped over a seat, and drew out a bung-like plug in the stern.

Then he scampered back, and ran with Messiter behind a couple of friendly trees.

As he had expected, Mr. Snarley had stopped to pay the rifle man for bringing down his hat, and the man not being able to leave his gallery had directed him to the old boat on the lake, telling him to row after and recover his property.

Polly had accompanied him to the waters' edge, and Dick heard her say:

"I am sorry you should have lost your hat while talking to me."

"What are hats?" replied Snarley, in a tragic voice; "what is the universe in comparison with?"

"If you stop to pay me high-flown compliments," she interrupted, "your hat will sink, and that will be an additional punishment to you for speaking to strangers in pleasure gardens."

"Angelic being!" began Snarley,

"Don't you make me laugh. I dare say you have got a wife at home."

"Divine creature hear me swear!" exclaimed Snarley, laying his hand on his heart.

"No; you mustn't do that. I shan't like you if you swear. Look after your hat."

Dick did not like this flirtation, so he threw a stone at Snarley's hat, which striking it on the crown made it to spin round in a most intoxicated manner.

A hungry-looking swan approached it as if he thought it was something good to eat.

"My hat; I must have it," groaned Snarley. "Boys are throwing at it, and swans peck it with their bills. Behold me, Agatha, about to embark in that crazy boat, and if you never see me more, drop one tear to the memory of a distracted being with whom to see was to admire you—to admire to love you."

With this impassioned speech, which he thought would make a great impression upon the fair Mountserratt, Snarley jumped into the boat and pushing her off with one of the sculls, he drifted towards the hat.

CHAPTER V.

DICK RENEWS HIS ACQUAINTANCE WITH POLLY.

"I SHALL soon recover my hat," said Mr. Snarley to himself.

He settled himself down to his work, and tucked up his sleeves so as to be better able to use the sculls.

"Ah!" he continued "a pleasant life is that on the ocean wave. Dear me, what a log this boat is. It scarcely seems to me to move a bit."

Polly was regarding his exertions from the bank, and he redoubled his efforts.

"Make haste, sir," she cried; "your hat will sink."

At that moment Dick, who with Messiter was concealed behind some shrubs, threw a stone at the hat, which hit it on the side and made it spin round like a teetotum.

"Some one is throwing stones," said Mr. Snarley.

"My dear young lady, can you kindly inform me who is throwing stones at my hat?"

"I can't see any one," answered Polly.

"It's very odd."

"Why don't you row harder?" asked Polly.

"For the most simple of all reasons, I am unable. Ha! what is this? I perceive water in the boat?"

"Water!" echoed Polly.

"Yes. As I am a sinner, the wretched old tub leaks. What is to be done?"

"Pull harder, sir."

"I am trying to do so. My utmost efforts, however do not suffice to propel the hulk more than a yard a minute. Oh!"

This exclamation was caused by his catching a crab, and falling back wards in the water which had accumulated in the boat, with a great splash.

The sculls fell on either side and floated away from his reach.

When he got up, he was dripping wet, and pale with rage.

"This is too much," he said.

Polly was laughing until the tears ran down her cheeks.

"Here do I come out for a day's pleasure," Mr. Snarley went on, "and I find it marred in this manner."

"Shall I send some of the garden people to your assistance, sir?" asked Polly.

"Do so, if you please, my dear young lady, and I shall be indebted to you. My position is a most unpleasant and even alarming one," replied Mr. Snarley. She walked quickly away, but Dick, who had left Messiter in the thicket, went after and intercepted her.

"Stop a bit, Polly," he cried.

"What do you mean by calling me—oh! it's Master Lightheart," cried Polly, recognizing him.

"Mister, please, Polly. You're Agatha when you're in public, and I'm Mister when I've got a chimney-pot hat on and go out for the day."

"Come with me," she said, laughing. "I'm so glad to see you. But there is a poor gentleman in a boat on the lake, and he'll be drowned if he is left to himself. The boat is leaky."

"I know it."

"You know it."

"Yes, I pulled the plug out."

"Oh!" said Polly, shocked.

"It's our usher, Mr. Snarley, and we've been having larks with him. I fastened the pilot balloon to his tile. You let him alone; he wasn't born to be drowned."

"Poor man!"

"I want to talk to you, Polly," continued Dick.

"So you shall presently; but I must send some one to the unlucky gentleman."

"Why?"

"I know that boat well."

"What then?"

"If you take the plug out it fills in ten minutes. Go round to the stage entrance to the theater and you'll find papa; promise me you will."

"When I've seen the last of Snarley in his watery grave," replied Dick.

Polly shook her head at him and ran away.

"Don't split about me, Polly," cried Dick after her, "if you do get him out."

She turned round, gave him a reassuring look, and then was out of sight.

Dick rejoined Messiter.

"Well," he said, "how's Snarley?"

"Bleating," replied Messiter; "hark at him."

In fact the usher was roaring for help at the top of his voice.

The boat was nearly full of water, and he sat on one of the seats with his arms round his knees, looking the personification of misery and despair.

Luckily there was another boat in which a gardener was able to pull off.

"Hold tight, sir," said the gardener.

"It's all very well to say hold tight when there is nothing to hold to," replied Snarley, and as he spoke the boat gave a lurch and capsized.

Snarley was struggling in the water.

He made a frantic grab at his hat, which bobbed away from him like a cork.

Then with a groan he prepared to sink, but at the critical moment the attendant came up with his boat and seized him by the arm and dragged him in.

Snarley lay down exhausted at the bottom.

"I'll bring an action against you all," he gasped. "I'll have the law of you."

"Is that all your gratitude?" replied the man.

"Haven't I saved your life?"

"Look at the state I am in. Where's my hat?"

"Bother your hat; here's the land; step out and don't shake yourself on me," the man said.

Mr. Snarley bestowed upon him a withering look and stepped sadly on shore.

He was soaked through and through, and he was hatless.

Old Hopkins, Polly's father, happened to be standing by, watching the fun with some others who had been attracted by the usher's cries.

"What shall I do?" groaned Snarley, dismally.

"I can give you a change, sir, while you have your things dried," said Hopkins.

"Do you belong to these gardens?" answered Snarley. "Because, if you do, I tell you fairly I mean to bring an action against you for putting people into leaky boats."

"I am engaged here, that's all. I've got a show on at the theatre, and if you like to put on some property togs, I'll have your own dried."

"Put on what?"

"Property togs. Pantaloon's dress, or anything handy," said Hopkins.

"I once had a clown's on," groaned Snarley. "But I see what you mean, and am thankful to you."

"Beggars mustn't be choosers, sir."

"Very truly. Lead on, my friend. You are a good Samaritan."

Hopkins conducted Mr. Snarley to a little room behind the stage of the theater which he was privileged to occupy.

There was another little room leading out of it, which was called the ladies' dressing-room.

In front of all was a larger apartment, which was dignified with the name of the green-room, in which the ladies and gentlemen connected with the theater waited for the call.

All sorts of costumes lay about; and there were a sprite, a harlequin, two policemen, a fishmonger, a baker, and a Bond Street swell attiring themselves.

"We've got a bit of pantomime on," said Mr. Hopkins, by way of explanation.

"Oh! have you?" replied Snarley, shivering.

"Where's Groggles?" continued Hopkins, addressing the sprite.

"Blind drunk, as usual, under the bar in the gardens. They poked him under with a broom, to let him sleep it out in the shady cool," answered the sprite.

"Blow Groggles!" exclaimed Hopkins, savagely.

"Nothing wrong, I hope," replied Snarley.

"Yes, there is, sir. I'm manager of this show, and as such I pay Groggles one two-and-six every Saturday."

"And the treasury never failed at two o'clock," put in the sprite.

"Nor never has since that thief, Captain Hanger died," replied Hopkins. "But, sir, Groggles gets systematically drunk."

"What is he?"

"Pantaloon. In real life he's a rheumatic fisherman on the retired list, but it makes him do the 'loon all the better."

Mr. Snarley's teeth chattered.

"It's what I call ungrateful of Groggles; but I'll dock his screw. If I don't—I say, sir, hold those castanets a-chattering. I forgot you were wet, all along of my indignation with Groggles. Take off your clothes and have a wipe with a clean towel; then put on Groggles' things."

"What! the pantaloons?" echoed Mr. Snarley, aghast.

"They'll save you from a severe cold, and are, at all events, better than nothing."

Mr. Snarley yielded, though much against his will, and giving up his own clothes, which were hung against a fire lighted on purpose to dry them, put on those of the facetious drama.

"It's too bad of Groggles," continued Hopkins.

"Here was he as 'ard up as 'ard up could be, when I fust come here and took the theater."

"Was he?" said Mr. Snarley.

"And no mistake. What do you think he did?—used to keep a property bloater—wooden fish, you know—on a plate in his room, to let people think he'd had a breakfast, or was going to, when never a morsel passed his lips."

"Really!"

"That's Groggles. He's all bounce and outside show," continued Hopkins.

"And drink," said the sprite.

"Undesirable member of company, I should think," continued Snarley.

He was now dry and comfortable, and sat warming his hands before a good fire, which, owing to the state of the weather, was more agreeable to him than the rest of the company.

"Not so bad a pantaloons. That sort of talent's scarce in the country," replied Hopkins.

"Is it?"

"Yes. You don't often get anyone to look the character. But now I come to see you, sir, you seem as if you were born a 'loon."

"I—I!" cried Mr. Snarley. "What do you mean?"

"I've been connected with the profession, sir, all my life, and done more for it, perhaps, than it has done for me, and I know what's what when I see it, and I say you're every inch a pantaloons."

Mr. Snarley got angry.

He snatched up a stick, and his legs being a little shaky, tottered up to Hopkins, saying:

"Take care, sir. Take care."

Hopkins leaned against the wall, and laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

"You can do it, sir," he cried; "I knew you was an actor. I could see it in your eyes."

"I an actor?"

"Yes. You can't deceive me. You've played low comedy."

"No."

"You have, and you've played farce."

"Never!" exclaimed Mr. Snarley, emphatically.

"And you're well up in comic business," pursued Hopkins.

"I know no more than a baby."

"Yes, you do. Stash it. Modesty won't do in our line. Look here, sir. I'll stand a dollar if you'll take Groggles's place this afternoon, and come in as pantaloons in 'Harlequin My Lord Tom Noddy and the Fairy Cabriolet.'"

Mr. Snarley listened to this singular offer with amazement.

He go on the stage!

Take Groggles's place! Play pantaloons!

The idea was enough to take his breath away.

CHAPTER VI.

CLOWN AND PANTALOON.

HOPKINS was destined to be in trouble that day.

No sooner was it discovered that Groggles was drunk and incapable, than a fresh misfortune was heard of.

Lapchin, the clown, had followed suit.

He was reported to be babbling childishly to himself over three of gin in a flowery arbor somewhere in the grounds.

"No one knows what it is to be the manager of a show," cried Hopkins. "I shall turn it up. I'd rather play the fiddle in the street for a living, or do the bones for a wandering minstrel troupe."

He rushed out to look for the unhappy Lapchin.

Before going far, he met Dick and Messiter, who were carrying Snarley's hat.

"Gentleman's as was nearly drowned?" asked Hopkins.

"That's it," replied Dick. "Take it to him; we hear you've got him in tow. I rescued it from the waters of the lake; but I say, Hopkins, old boy, don't you recognize me?"

"Give us your fist," cried Hopkins; "you're the young school gent Polly's talked so much about ever since you saved her life when we were cirussing?"

"You're right. I am that singularly fortunate individual."

"Blowed if I should know my own father to-day, I'm that upset," continued Hopkins.

"What's up?"

"Up. Nobody's up. They're all down. It's the last day. We close the show to-night, for it's the end of the season, and the blessed company's all getting drunk."

"That's bad," said Dick.

"It's all my own fault. I shouldn't have given them a treasury this morning at nine sharp."

"You paid them too soon."

"I did. They thought I might bolt in the night, and they pressed me for their last week's screws before it was time to pay them. I yielded like a baby as I am, and what's the consequence?"

Hopkins looked round him inquiringly.

"The consequence is, that Groggles the pantaloons is drunk, ditto Lapchin the clown."

"What will you do?"

"Half-drowned gent's dressed up in Groggles's togs, and he's going to play pantaloons," replied Hopkins.

Dick's eyes twinkled with delight.

"Snarley going to play pantaloons!" he said; "never."

"He is, though. Do you know him?" said Hopkins.

"Rather. He's our usher," replied Dick.

"Oh! if that's it, Master Lighthouse, I needn't ask how he came into the pond."

"You mustn't tell him we're here, though; he doesn't know it."

"Hasn't he seen you?"

"Not yet. We're his fate, but it's the awful mystery of the hidden hand—twig?"

"I see," replied Hopkins.

"We're on the spree," continued Dick. "Come and have a drink, old man. Anything you like, from bitter beer, the simple and refreshing bitter, to champagne."

"I don't mind a glass of shammy," answered Hopkins. "It'll square me up a bit."

"Come on, then, and I'll make you happy."

"How?"

"By undertaking to play clown to Snarley's pantaloons."

Hopkins was startled at the proposition.

"I think you could do it. If you'll come on the

stage with me, I'll put you up to the business in ten minutes," he said.

"I've been to pantomimes, don't fret," exclaimed Dick. "It's only having larks with and bullying the pantaloons."

"That's it. Bully him awful!" said Hopkins.

"Won't I? If he don't halloo a rum un when I begin with him, I'll go home and say I've been a bad boy," answered Dick.

"Then we'll leave Lapchin to drink as long as he likes. Let's have the drink and we'll go behind," Hopkins said.

They went to a bar, and Dick ordered refreshments.

Messiter was left eating cold pie, while Hopkins and Dick went to the theater.

A little information was not lost upon him.

Dick dressed on the stage and painted his face so that Mr. Snarley should not recognize him.

When he was ready, he went into the ordinary dressing-room and found Mr. Snarley getting very jolly over repeated hot grogs, which he took to keep the cold out.

It was now two o'clock in the day, and the first performance had to begin.

Hopkins hoped that Groggles and Lapchin would be sober enough to play by four, when the public were next admitted. Messiter, who had been gorging cold pies and tarts, took a frontseat in the stalls, and ate nuts and oranges in a reckless manner.

First Miss Agatha Mountserratt did some graceful dancing and sang some pretty songs.

She was a wood nymph; and a satyr, who afterwards became harlequin, followed her about and annoyed her.

At length the bell rang and Dick, preceded by Mr. Snarley, rushed on the stage, harlequin and columbine appearing at the same time.

"Hullo! here we are again, Snarley," cried Dick.

Dick gave him a slap on the face that made him spin round.

"Oh! my eye!" cried Snarley.

"Who told you to speak?" exclaimed Dick.

The look of pain Snarley put on was indicative of an apparent wish to please the audience, and they roared accordingly.

From that moment, whenever Dick got a chance of kicking or hitting the unlucky pantaloons, he did it as hard as he could.

His bones ached all over.

Pantaloons had to climb through a shoemaker's window, but he stuck after he had got the upper part of his body through.

Dick snatched the harlequin's wand, and belabored his nether regions till he howled like a bull calf.

When he came off and stood near the clown in the wings, he said, rubbing himself dismally:

"What do you want to hit and punch and kick like that for?"

"It's business," replied Dick.

Snarley groaned, and was soon engaged in trying to discover which was the hardest, his head or a wooden turnip.

At last it was over.

Dick ran into the dressing-room and put under his arm Snarley's dry clothes, which he made into a little parcel.

He changed his own things in a little cupboard, and then ran out to the stage door, where he found Messiter.

"How did I do it?" asked Dick.

"Ripping. Every yell Snarley gave was real, wasn't it?" replied Messiter.

"Rather."

"I think he twigged me. His eyes seemed to single me out in the stalls, and once I had a good mind to give him an orange on the nose."

"I don't fancy he did see you. It was your nervousness," said Dick.

"What have you got under your arm?"

"Snarley's dry clothes. Find a half a brick," said Dick.

"What for?"

"To tie to them and sink in the pond. Snarley must never see these togs again. Never," answered Dick.

"How will he go home?"

"In his professional attire."

"Oh, Dick," exclaimed Messiter, "how I shall laugh. You'll be the death of me."

"Hope not," said Dick. "You are young, and I have some faint expectation of making a man of you yet."

"Thank you."

They went to the side of the pond, and Snarley's clothes found their last resting-place.

"Now," said Dick, "I'm going to have some dinner in the refreshment saloon. Can you eat anything, or have you choked yourself up with trash?"

"Not quite."

"I saw you gorging into nuts and things, while I was doing clown."

"We must not loose the balloon ascent," said Messiter.

"Not for worlds. What time does it start?"

"Six, I think."

"Come and feed; we've lots of time," said Dick, looking at his watch.

They walked arm in arm to the saloon, sat down at a table and called for the waiter.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BALLOON ASCENT.

"WAITER," said Dick, "we want to dine."

"Yes, sir; bill of fare, sir," replied the waiter, with a napkin tucked professionally under one arm, while he jingled his money in his breeches pocket with his other hand.

"Ah!" said Dick, with the eye of a connoisseur, as he ran over the list: "Spring soup, er—turbot and

lobster sauce, er—ducks and green peas, er—lamb and grass, er—maccareni au gratin a la tomate, jellies, ice pudding, and er—bottle of Bordeaux, that at 42 shillings, and, er—ice, and plenty of it."

"Yes, sir; directly, sir," said the waiter, hurrying off.

"You can order a dinner, Dick, and no mistake," exclaimed Messiter.

"Don't you wish you hadn't gone in for those pies and things?"

"I've got a corner left. The waiter thinks you're a swell. How he did look at you."

"So I am," answered Dick, complacently.

"Do you think you will have money enough?" Messiter inquired, anxiously.

"Lots. We haven't touched the subscriptions for *Oko Jumbo* yet," Dick replied, with a grin.

When the dinner appeared, they did ample justice to it.

Dick paid the bill, rewarded the waiter liberally, and chewing a toothpick, walked again into the gardens.

The balloon was moored by a couple of ropes to the ground, which the car almost touched.

It was a comfortable wickerwork construction, and Dick, with his usual impudence, got in.

"Oh, said Messiter, come out—do come out, Dick. You'll have the man it belongs to on to you."

"I'll give him five shillings to take me up with him," answered Dick.

"Would you really go in a thing like that?"

"Why not? It's safe enough, and the seat's jolly comfortable."

"Is it?" said Messiter, doubtfully.

"Come in and try it."

With fear and trembling Messiter climbed in, and took a seat opposite Dick.

"Now," said the latter, "what is there to fear?"

"Not much certainly, that I can see at present, but going through the air is different."

"What's that row?" suddenly said Dick.

"A great hubbub was proceeding from the back part of the theater, which was not many yards off."

"You've stolen my clothes," cried a voice, raised in anger.

"Who are you a-talking to about stealing?" retorted Hopkins.

"It's Hopkins and Snarley. Here's a spree," cried Dick delightedly.

"I'll call the police," continued Mr. Snarley, emerging from the dressing-room. "You keep me in here, make me work for you, and try to cause me to become intoxicated on bad gin, while you steal my clothes."

"It's false."

"It's true. I have heard of the tricks of you strolling players, but I'll make an example of you. Police! Police!"

"You're drunk," said Hopkins; "that's about the size of it, and I'll have to lock you up."

"Hal! hal!" cried Snarley, cutting a caper on the grass. "I defy you, villain, and all your myrmidons!"

He looked extremely comical in his pantaloons' dress, his tight-fitting wig, and his long peaky beard.

"I didn't think I could laugh so much," observed Dick.

"He's tight," said Messiter.

Reeling up to Hopkins, and snapping his fingers in his face, Snarley exclaimed:

"My clothes, miscreant, my clothes."

"I haven't got 'em. They're vanished, and I think I know where they're gone," replied the showman.

"Where? Tell me your suspicions and I'll forgive you," said the usher, eagerly.

"Two of your boys are in the garden," replied Hopkins.

"Oh, Agatha's father," groaned Dick, "I didn't think you'd split on us."

"It's all up now," said Messiter.

"We shall be carried back to the house of bondage," Dick said.

"My boys!" said Snarley. "Who, what, where? Name them—explain this mystery."

"One of them is Master Lightheart. He played clown to your pantaloons."

"That accounts for the blows I received. Go on, Mr. Showman."

"They're about somewhere. Now, if any one's had your things, it's them," replied Hopkins.

Messiter had a half-peeled orange in his hand.

"Give it me," whispered Dick.

Taking it from him, he threw it dexterously at Hopkins and hit him on the ear.

"Don't you throw any oranges at me," exclaimed Hopkins, squaring up to Snarley.

"I didn't," replied Snarley.

"It came from the balloon," remarked a bystander.

"Did it?" the usher replied. "Then the boys are there; but how they got into the gardens I don't know—yes, I do—they had a holiday, Lightheart and Messiter. Two twin imps, Mr. Showman."

"Sir."

"Help me to capture these audacious culprits."

"I shan't help you. Go and talk to them; there they are seated in the car of the balloon, happy as bugs in a rug."

Mr. Snarley ran to the ropes which shut off the enclosure.

The boys were distinctly visible.

"Ah! you Lightheart. Ah! you Messiter," said Mr. Snarley, with concentrated anger, "come out of that."

"Who are you?" replied Dick.

"Your usher."

"I don't believe you. My usher wouldn't dress himself like a pantaloons."

"It was done to—a—propitiate the father of a lovely girl, the—a—the beautiful Agatha Mountserratt. But no matter. Come out of that and help me recover my clothes."

"I shan't. You've no right to order me about. I'm not at school now, Mr. Pantaloons," answered Dick.

"Then I will pull you out by your arms and your legs, and I will make an example of you," said the usher.

He climbed over the ropes.

Dick drew a knife from his pocket, and leaning over the side of the car, began to cut away at something.

"Oh! what are you doing?" said Messiter, in alarm.

"Sit perfectly still," answered Dick, who was very grave.

"The thing is beginning to wobble about."

"It will be all right presently. Take up one of those bags of sand at your feet, and shy it plump at Snarley. Make haste."

Messiter did as he was told.

The bag hit him on the nose, and he fell backwards sprawling.

"Give him another."

Messiter did so, and this time he hit him in the stomach.

"Oh!" groaned Snarley, getting on his hands and knees. "What a thing it is to deal with a wicked and perverse generation. He has taken all my little stock of wind."

Suddenly the balloon began to rise in the air.

The spectators shouted loudly.

Rushing from the refreshment saloon, where he had been beguiling his leisure moments, the proprietor ran out.

He tore his hair.

He raved and shrieked.

His beautiful balloon was gone, and he might never see it again.

"Give him one on the nob and stop his row," said Dick.

Messiter dropped another bag of sand on the proprietor's head.

It knocked his hat over his eyes, and he floundered about in utter darkness.

"Stop! stop!" cried Mr. Snarley. "Misguided boys, hold your mad career; you will be killed. This is a disastrous day. Stop, stop!"

He fell down again on his back, having been struck by another bag of sand, which this time, falling from some height, stunned him.

All was confusion and excitement in the gardens.

Hopkins took hold of Snarley, and with assistance carried him to a fly, in which he placed him.

"Drive this gentleman to Harrow House School, Kemp Town, Brighton," he said. "He's tight, and we can't have any more of his nonsense here. He'll get locked up."

"Right," said the fly driver.

"Don't you let him get out."

"Not I."

"Tell them at the school that I shall call for the pantaloons' dress to-morrow," continued Hopkins.

The flyman jumped on his box, and Mr. Snarley was driven off to Brighton.

The blow he had received, the excitement, and the spirits he had swallowed, all combined to make Mr. Snarley drowsy.

He did not wake until he was landed at Harrow House, about seven o'clock in the evening.

The flyman knocked at the door which was opened by Mr. Simcox in person.

Mr. Snarley was roused by the driver and jumped out.

He ran up the steps.

"Who are you and what do you want here?" said Mr. Simcox.

"Do you know me, sir?" replied Snarley.

"You are—yes, you must be my assistant teacher. But why this disguise? Once before you returned dressed as a clown. Is this a joke? Is this done on purpose, sir?"

"No, sir."

"Are you sober?"

"Stand on one side," cried Mr. Snarley, in a rage, "I won't be kept on the steps for little boys to gibe at."

He pushed his respected head master on one side and entered the house.

"This conduct is highly reprehensible, sir," said Mr. Simcox, shutting the door.

"Do you want to fight?" cried Snarley.

"Fight! bless me, no."

"Then don't provoke me too far. I can fight, though I've had enough excitement for one day."

"How did it happen?"

"Young Lightheart was at Shoreham Gardens."

"Ah! With his father, I presume," said the head master.

"No; he and Messiter were by themselves, and they've done this for me."

"Where are they now? Why did you not bring them back with you?"

Mr. Snarley laughed wildly.

"Ha! ha!"

"You laugh."

"Yes, at the idea of bringing them back, when they're off in a balloon. 'Up in a balloon, boys, up in a balloon, all among the pretty stars, sailing round the moon,' as the song says."

"Mr. Snarley."

"Sir."

"Again I must ask you, are you sober?"

"Rubbish, I am all right," replied the usher, "though this day I have gone through enough to consign any average man to a lunatic asylum."

He briefly told Mr. Simcox all that had happened.

"Dear me. This is alarming news. The boys will be killed," said the head master.

Mr. Snarley was going to say: "A good job, too," but he held his peace.

Simcox led the way into his sitting-room and produced wine and cakes.

The usher drank sherry out of a tumbler, helping himself two or three times.

He had had no dinner that day, and the wine, added to his previous potations, took effect upon him.

"Is this prudent, Mr. Snarley?" Mr. Simcox ventured to remonstrate.

He was filling his glass for the fourth time.

"You be bothered," replied Snarley.

"Do you know who you're talking to, sir?" Mr. Simcox exclaimed, severely.

"If you're game for a dance, fair heel and toe, I'm your man. Come on," answered Snarley.

Receiving no response, he began to dance fantastically. Mr. Simcox looked on dismayed.

Presently the door opened, and he waltzed into Mrs. Simcox's arms.

Seizing her round the waist, he swung her round and round till he got giddy, and they both fell in a corner.

Disengaging herself, Mrs. Simcox, breathless with indignation, said—"Well, hi never! he's bon hagain."

"It's Mr. Snarley disguised, my dear," said her husband.

"Disguised in liquor, the beast! Send him to bed and discharge him."

"I must think about it. At present I am in a mist. My head whirls. What will become of those boys?" In great perplexity Mr. Simcox walked up and down the room.

Mr. Snarley snored pleasantly, and Mrs. Simcox helped herself to sherry to calm her nerves.

CHAPTER VIII.

A VOYAGE THROUGH THE AIR.

"We're off," said Dick, as the balloon shot up into the air.

Messiter was about to throw out another bag of sand, of which there were several in the car.

"Drop that," said Dick.

"Why? I can just plant a cove below beautifully on the nut."

"It's ballast, and the more you throw out the higher we go."

"Is that it?" replied Messiter.

"I've read about balloon ascents, and you must let me be captain of this ship," said Dick.

They sailed gayly away over Brighton, and then over the open country of Sussex.

At first they liked it.

Their appearance created a sensation everywhere, and the boys turned out crying: "Ah-bah-loon, ah-bah-loon!"

They could distinctly hear the shouts, and even the barking of a dog was audible.

At length there were no boys to shout, and the villages were few and far between.

Still they went on, on, with a pleasant, gliding motion.

"How is this going to end?" exclaimed Messiter, looking glum.

"Blessed if I know," replied Dick.

"Isn't there a way of getting down?"

"I believe so. You let the gas out."

"How?" asked Messiter.

"That is the question. There is, I fancy, a valve in the bottom of the balloon, and if you pull a string, the gas escapes, and you descend."

"Pull it then."

"Where is it?"

"I can see a string twined to one of the ropes of the car," said Messiter.

Dick examined it, and thought that this was the right string.

"Wait a bit," he said, "we won't go down just yet; let's have our spree out."

"I'm getting frightened."

"What at?"

"I don't know exactly, but it makes one dizzy to look over the side."

"Don't do it then," said Dick, who was a philosopher. Messiter turned his attention to the interior of the car.

At his feet there was a locker, which he opened.

It contained some cold provisions, a bottle of brandy, and a stone bottle of beer.

"Grub!" he exclaimed.

"What sort of grub?" asked Dick.

"A pie, a chicken, part of a tongue, brandy, beer and gin, half a dozen of cham."

"That's good," exclaimed Dick. "Haul out the cham, we'll have a bottle."

He quickly opened a bottle and they drank a tumbler apiece.

"What a rage the aeronaut will be in; we've run off with his machine, and we're making free with his grub," said Dick.

"I wish we had not done it," groaned Messiter.

"It's better than being taken back by Snarley; we're safe enough. It's only the novelty of the thing that makes you afraid. Some day we shall have steam balloons, and it will be as natural for a man to go to business in his balloon as it is to go in his bus."

"You'll go down before dark."

"Certainly."

"Where are we now, do you think?" asked Messiter.

"This is the Thames underneath us; how quickly we must have gone. It must be the Thames, as it is the only big river we've got; and look at the ships!"

They went on and sailed over part of Essex, which they recognized by its flat, marshy aspect.

"Suppose we try to land here?" said Dick.

"I shall be so glad. Oh, do try," answered Messiter.

Dick took hold of the string, and instead of pulling it gently, gave it a jerk.

The string snapped close up to the valve.

He stood with the broken piece in his hand and looked blankly at his companion.

"The beastly thing's broken!" he exclaimed, in a tone of disgust.

"Oh, don't say that!" exclaimed Messiter.

"Here's a go; we're stumped."

"Can't you reach the end?"

"I could if I were able to fly; that's the only way. Look what a height it is off."

Messiter began to cry.

The balloon now got into a different current of air. It left English soil, and the boys could see the blue rolling waves of the sea beneath them.

"We're over the sea. I wonder what sea it is?" remarked Dick.

"It must be the German Ocean," answered Messiter, between his sobs.

"We couldn't land now if we wanted to. Open another bottle of fiz, Harry; it's getting cold," said Dick.

With trembling hands Messiter obeyed, and they drank the sparkling wine in silence.

The shades of night began to fall.

All was dark, dismal and cheerless.

The breaking of the valve-string was a veritable misfortune to them.

They had delayed the descent too long; now it was impossible.

Even if they had been able to reach the valve and let the gas out, they could not have descended on the waves.

That would have been to court certain death by drowning.

"Now, Harry," said Dick, "you must show yourself an intrepid voyager, no humbug; crying won't do any good."

"I can't help it; you do such funny things," answered Messiter. "Who but you would have thought of cutting the ropes, and going off in a balloon?"

"It's one of the penalties you have to pay for keeping my acquaintance," said Dick, coolly.

"I'll"—began Messiter, who stopped short.

"Go on, Harry," exclaimed Dick. "I know what you mean. You'll cut me when we get safe home. Isn't that it?"

"If ever we do."

"Say your prayers, like a good boy, and go to sleep," Dick continued, wrapping his jacket more tightly around his breast and neck.

Thoroughly exhausted, Messiter sank down on the bottom of the car and tried to go to sleep, which he succeeded in doing.

Dick sat with his arms folded in thought.

The sea was beneath him.

Above was the firmament, studded with innumerable stars.

Occasionally he could see the headlight of some ship ploughing her way to distant lands.

Toward morning a cold rain fell, which wet him to the skin and chilled him to the bone.

He was obliged to drink some of the brandy in the locker to support himself.

When the rain was over, day broke, and the sun rose resplendent in the heavens.

Its warm rays served to dry the boys, and their spirits rose again as they made a good breakfast.

They were still over the sea, and as the wind was fresh, appeared to be traveling at a rapid pace.

"Dick," said Messiter.

Lighthouseart was dozing in a corner.

"Well?" he replied.

"Would the balloon go on forever like this, cutting through the air?"

"No. It would get rotten and smash up, or a storm might destroy it."

"Where are we going?" continued Messiter.

"As far as I can judge, direct to the North Pole," replied Dick.

"How horrible!"

"We shall be picked up some day by some Arctic travelers, in the form of frozen boys, and be talked of as great curiosities."

"Oh, why did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Start on this mad voyage," said Messiter.

"I don't know; it was an impulse. Frankly though," answered Dick, growling, "I wish I hadn't done it, and that's flat."

"I'd give anything to be at Simcox & Markwell's, if it was only in the black hole. It's dreadful to die so young."

"We're not dead yet, Harry," said Dick, in a cheerful voice.

He was far from feeling merry, but he wanted to cheer his companion.

"No; but we soon shall be," groaned Messiter.

"Perhaps not," said Dick; "it all depends upon the wind. Wait a bit."

Messiter sighed deeply, and seemed to resign himself to his fate.

Dick, however, took up a telescope he found in the locker, and began to scrutinize the horizon minutely.

CHAPTER IX.

ARMOND'S DIARY.

THE news of Lighthouseart and Messiter's disappearance in a balloon flew through the school like wild fire.

It caused the utmost excitement among the boys.

Dick was a general favorite, and it was hoped that before long he would return.

The croakers, and they were not few in number, shook their heads and declared that they thought the school had seen the last of the runaways.

Mr. Simcox telegraphed for the Rev. Mr. Lighthouseart, who came over to Brighton and

met the proprietor of the balloon at Harrow House.

He was a man of the name of Turner.

Mr. Lighthouseart was much concerned about his son's safety.

"What do you think will be the result?" he said to Turner.

"It's impossible to tell, sir," said the man; "if the boys understand the valve, they can let out the gas and descend rapidly."

"Would they not have done so before now if they had this knowledge?"

Turner imagined they would.

"I fear," he said, "that my new and beautiful balloon will be lost; but you, sir, are a gentleman, and will of course compensate me."

"How dare you talk to me of compensation," cried Mr. Lighthouseart, indignantly, "when my boy's life is in danger?"

"But"—

"There is no 'but' about it; you should have exercised more vigilance, and not allowed the boys to get into your balloon."

"When Richard went away in the boat, he telegraphed directly he reached land," observed Mr. Simcox.

"He did; and I fancy he would have done the same thing had he descended. There are telegraphs everywhere," said Mr. Lighthouseart.

"In what direction would the wind blow them?" asked Mr. Simcox.

"Due north," answered Turner.

"They would be blown over the German Ocean."

"Precisely."

"My poor, rash boy," said Mr. Lighthouseart, "he may be frozen to death amid the fogs and frosts of the North Pole. It is dreadful to think of."

The conversation continued in a similar strain, but without bringing one gleam of consolation to the sorrowing parent.

"You see, sir," said Mr. Simcox, "that I am not to blame. The boy forged your handwriting, or I should not have let him go out."

"I know it; he is a bad boy."

In the course of the day Messiter's father arrived, and he was equally perplexed and anxious.

They returned home in the evening, hoping against hope, but when night fell no news had arrived.

Armond did not disguise his delight at the disappearance of his enemy.

After twelve, the boys were allowed to stroll on the beach.

Armond went out, taking with him his inseparable companion, Smith.

Smith was his toady, and he confided all his secrets to him.

They sat down together on the pebbly beach behind a bathing-machine, which protected them from the wind.

"I'm glad," said Armond, "that the beast Lighthouseart is gone at last."

"So am I," replied Smith.

"How I do hate him."

"You have cause to. Is there no chance of his coming back?"

"I think not. Neither he nor Messiter know how to manage a balloon, which is a very delicate thing to handle."

"He was very nearly being maimed for life on the trapeze," remarked Smith.

"I meant him to be," answered Armond, incautiously.

"Then you did cut the rope?" said Smith.

"Yes," replied Armond; "you are my friend, and I don't mind admitting the truth to you, because I know my secret is safe."

"Oh, as to that," answered Smith, "I like you too well, Armond, to let on. I never blab about you."

"I know it, and I trust you as a brother. We have worked together ever since I have been at this school."

"You shall have no cause to repent your confidence."

"No fear. You're made out of the right stuff. You and I were cut out for chums," answered Armond.

"I hope so."

"When I think of the insults that fellow Lighthouseart has heaped upon me, it makes my blood boil."

"He called you the son of a tripe-dresser, and a bill-discounter, and Cocky, and B. B., and"—

"Don't go through the list, you only make me mad," interrupted Armond. "I could see him dead at my feet with pleasure."

"He'll never come back, you say, so that is one comfort," observed Smith.

His little, ugly, freckly face gleamed with gratified malignity.

Armond took a book from his pocket, which was secured with clasps and a lock.

"This is my diary," he said.

Turning to a certain page, he added:

"Here is my entry about the trapeze affair."

"Read it," exclaimed Smith, "if you don't mind."

"Went down to the gymnasium and cut the ropes of the last trapeze upon which Lighthouseart was to spring a match with me—Was very sorry my attempt failed, and Lighthouseart was too wary, and would not take the leap—He escaped, but the attendant fell. Bad luck this. Hope for better next time—I hate him now more than ever."

"Ain't you afraid of some one seeing it?" asked Smith.

"No. It has a lock and is never out of my possession. When not in my pocket it's in my desk, and I have the key of that," Armond replied.

He began to write in it with a pencil.

Smith looked over his shoulder.

"Hear that Lighthouseart has run away in a balloon, and is not likely to be seen any more—Hope he won't be—This is really good news."

"It is wicked to hate people," said Smith. "But I think we may be excused for hating Lighthouseart."

"Ain't it different where a fellow brings it on himself?" said Armond.

"Yes."

"I would have let him alone if he had not molested me."

The voice of Rumcovey the pie-man was heard.

"Tarts, cakes or buns this morning, sir?"

He addressed a young man who had been lying down on the bench almost under the bathing-machine, and close to the spot where Armond and his precious toady were.

"Any tarts, Mr. Jack?"

The young man put his fingers to his lips, and saying "hush," walked quickly away.

Rumcovey looked after him, muttering:

"Something up. No business of mine," and approached Armond, crying in his monotonous voice, "Any tarts, cakes, or buns to-day, sir. The learned Armond, sir."

"What do you call me learned for?" asked Armond.

"You are the head of Messrs. Simeox & Markwell's school, sir. Tarts, cakes, or buns to-day, sir?" said Rumcovey.

"Treat me," said Smith; "I haven't got any tin."

"Here's sixpence; lay it out to the best advantage," said Armond.

Smith made his purchases and paid Rumcovey.

Meanwhile the young man whom the pie-man first addressed hurried along to the cliff.

He was no other than Jackson, the assistant at the gymnasium.

Jackson who had been injured by falling from a trapeze.

He had been enjoying a lounge on the beach.

Chance had enabled him to overhear the conversation between Smith and Armond.

This was very important to him.

At last he had found out that his suspicions were correct.

He had all along believed that Lighthouseart was incapable of doing the shabby action that Armond and his friends imputed to him.

CHAPTER X.

DICK'S DESPERATE ATTEMPT.

Without losing any time he hastened to Harrow House, and asked to see Mr. Simcox. Mr. Simcox had just been having an interview with Mr. Snarley, who did not get up early.

It was a satisfactory one.

Snarley explained how he had been treated, and Mr. Simcox generously forgave him, and reinstated him in his good opinion once more.

"Well, young man, what can I do for you?" exclaimed Mr. Simcox, as his visitor was ushered in.

"My name is Jackson, sir; attendant at the gymnasium," was the reply.

"Oh, ah, yes. I remember. You were hurt there by some accident. Sad thing. Better now, I hope."

"Yes, thank you, sir. A little stiffness in the left knee, that is all."

"Well, we did all we could for you. Can't do anything more."

"You can do justice, sir," replied Jackson.

"To whom?"

"A young gentleman named Lighthouse was accused of being the cause of my accident."

"By whom?" asked Mr. Simcox.

"Some of his companions, of whom Mr. Armond was the leader."

"Well?"

"He didn't do it," said Jackson.

"How do you know that?" It may be that if we establish Lighthouse's innocence—and mind you, I never accused him, or took up the matter at all—the exculpation will not be of much use to him."

"How is that, sir?"

"He is missing; but go on with your story," returned Mr. Simcox, curtly.

Jackson then related the conversation he had heard between Armond and Smith on the beach.

"Very improbable," replied Mr. Simcox, who for reasons of his own wished to stand well with Armond and his father.

"Ask for his diary. If you see the confession in black and white, you'll believe it then, won't you, sir," said Jackson.

"Yes, very true, that will be evidence; we must get that diary. I will see into it. Thank you for your information; but in future don't you think it would be more creditable to you, Mr. Jackson, not to lie under bathing-machines listening to people's conversation?"

Jackson flushed angrily.

"It was accidental," he ejaculated. "I didn't mean to, nor should I have continued to listen unless I had been interested in the revelation; and I think I was perfectly justified in doing so."

"Ah, that's a matter of opinion," Mr. Simcox said, stroking his whiskers.

"I can see how it is," Jackson exclaimed, indignantly. "You like this Armond, and you want to make Lighthouse the scapegoat."

"My good young man"—

"Don't 'good young man' me!" interrupted Jackson, who was insensible to Mr. Simcox's persuasive tones.

"But listen"—

"I will not, sir, until you have heard what I have to say."

"What is that?"

"I now know who is the cause of my injury, and if you do not take means to bring the offender to justice, I will."

Jackson spoke with determination, and Mr. Simcox lowered his tone.

"Very good," he replied. "I have no fault to find with the purport of your remarks, though you are a little violent. Call upon me this day week, and I will see what can be done in the interim."

"Thank you, sir. I will be satisfied with that promise."

"Good-morning," said Mr. Simcox, ringing the bell.

Jackson did not wait for the attendant to show him out, but opened the door himself.

When he was gone, Mr. Simcox sent for Mr. Snarley.

He wished to consult him as to the best course to be adopted.

It was bitterly cold up in the air.

The balloon seemed to be traversing the icy regions of the north.

Dick's hand trembled as he grasped the glass, and he could scarcely hold it.

But by means of a telescope he was enabled to see that which made his heart thump in his breast.

He saw land!

The balloon was drifting right over against it.

"Now, Harry," he exclaimed, "what's your lotion?—put a name to it."

"Oh, no, thank you. I don't want to drink anything. My head aches already," replied Messiter.

"Then I must. I want a reviver."

"What for?"

"I've got work in hand," replied Dick.

"What sort of work?"

"Aerial navigation, my boy. There is land ahead, and it won't do for us to travel any further."

"Do you think you will be able to manage a descent?" asked Messiter.

"I mean to try."

"How?"

"You see that little bit of string flapping up against the valve?" replied Dick.

"Yes."

"I intend to climb up the ropes which bind the car to the machine, and lay hold of that with my teeth."

"If you slip?"

"It is all over with me—that's soon settled," answered Dick.

He drank a little brandy, and the boys anxiously watched the course of the balloon.

The land appeared at first a mere speck; it gradually grew larger, and at length they could see they were traversing the region of a huge pine forest.

"This must be Norway," exclaimed Dick.

"Oh! what a way we have come. How shall we ever get back again?" said Messiter.

"That don't worry me the least little bit. Let us only by God's mercy put our foot on land, and we'll get back again somehow. Never fear."

"Will the trees hurt the balloon?"

"Don't for goodness sake worry me with your childish questions," replied Dick impatiently. "You're worse than a baby. Of course they will; the trees will smash it up, but what do we care for a bit of varnished silk. It's our lives I'm thinking of just now."

"You must bear with me, Dick," said Messiter; "I know I'm foolish sometimes."

"Dick took his jacket and boots off, cold as it was, so as to be able to climb with more freedom."

"If I slip, Harry," he said, "I shall be dashed to pieces, but I'll do my best for your sake as well as my own."

"Never mind me," said Messiter, sobbing again.

"But I do and must. It was I who got you into this scrape. Shake hands and say you forgive me."

"Willingly."

The two boys shook hands.

"If anything should happen, and if you should fluke out of it after all, say I died in trying to do my duty," said Dick.

Messiter only answered with sobs.

"Give my last love to Henrietta, and my duty and affection to my parents and the rest of the people at home."

Messiter nodded his head.

His little heart was too full for words.

Dick began the ascent.

In that hour of peril he showed all the qualities that go to make a hero.

It was with the utmost difficulty that he contrived to haul himself up the slender cords which bound the car to the balloon.

They seemed scarcely able to maintain his weight.

Slowly but surely he got higher and higher.

At last his head touched the top of the valve. He was hanging on to one cord now.

Moving his head on one side he grasped the string with his teeth.

Instantly a rush of gas took place which nearly suffocated him.

He was obliged to let go.

Hand-under-hand he descended the rope, and stood in the car once more.

"That won't do," he said, faintly.

"Can't you manage it?" asked Messiter, trembling.

"I can do it, but not that way. Find a bit of string, Harry," said Dick.

Messiter gave him some which was in the locker, and armed with this, Dick ascended again.

He exercised the same laborious caution, and was rewarded by once more reaching the valve.

Tying a loop in the broken bit of string, he fastened to it that which he had brought up with him.

Then he slid down, holding the string in his mouth.

Pulling it gently, the valve opened, and out rushed the gas.

In less than a minute the balloon began to fall with rapidity.

"Gently, gently," muttered Dick, not pulling so hard on the string.

The gas escaped more slowly.

Therefore, the fall of the balloon was not so rapid or dangerous.

"Get ready the grappling-irons," cried Dick.

This was a sort of anchor made fast to the car by a strong cable.

Its use was to enable the travelers to cast it out and check their progress, as it hitched in the branches of a tree.

"Stand by," continued Dick, "and cast when I give you the word."

"All right," replied Messiter.

He stood, grapnel in hand, waiting for the signal.

Gradually, very gradually, the huge machine neared the black funeral pine forest.

No sun was to be seen.

The sky was dull and leaden, and there appeared to have been a recent fall of snow, as the topmost branches of the trees were white.

"I shall cut the car loose," said Dick.

"Do what?" asked Messiter.

"Cut the ropes of the car when we strike. It contains food and things that will be of use to us."

Presently they were skimming over the tops of the pine trees.

"Cast!" exclaimed Dick.

Messiter did so.

The grapnel caught in a bough and held fast, while the car settled between two branches.

The balloon, however, tore and rolled in a frantic manner.

Hastily Dick slashed away at the many ropes which bound the machine and the car together.

After a time he cut the last strand, and the huge balloon, like a thing in pain, swayed away into the heavens.

"There it goes," exclaimed Messiter.

The car gave a lurch.

"And there you'll go, if you don't watch it," replied Dick.

The boys grasped the branches of the pine, to steady the car, which had settled in a fork.

"Thank God, we are safe," exclaimed Messiter, clasping his hands together in gratitude to Providence.

Dick said nothing, but his lips moved and the tears came into his eyes, while his limbs shook convulsively.

The danger was over now, and the reaction had set in.

His nervous system had been severely tried.

The trembling did not last long; he was soon himself again, and as the depression wore off and a sense of safety and deliverance dawned upon his mind, he gave way to high glee.

"We're all right now, Harry," he said.

"I don't see it," replied Messiter. "We're up a tree, and how to get down I don't know, and where we are when we do get down I can't tell, and how to get home again is more"—

"Shut up," cried Dick; "you're like a dog at a fair, no sooner out of one trouble than you're into another."

"Well, arn't we up a tree?"

"Never mind, we'll get down. Go first."

"No, thank you," replied Messiter. "I'm not going to be eaten by bears or torn to pieces by wolves in a strange country."

"Bosh!"

"It isn't bosh. I'd rather stay here. I'm very comfortable where I am."

"Oh! all right," replied Dick, carelessly. "You've been flying through the air so long that, perhaps, you fancy you're a bird, and have got a nest in a tree. Hadn't you better go to roost?"

"Don't chaff, Dick."

"I'm not afraid of anything living, now I'm out of that blessed bah-loon," exclaimed Dick, "and I'm going down."

Dropping from branch to branch, he soon found himself on the ground.

The trees were thickly planted together, and they were evidently in the midst of an impenetrable forest.

On the ground between the trees was snow of a considerable depth.

The cold was intense, and the prospect anything but cheering.

"I don't know that Harry hasn't got the best of it up there, after all," he muttered.

"How are you down there?" said Messiter from above.

"Lovely," replied Dick. "There's a turkey carpet, and table and chairs, and quite a cozy little cottage."

"It there, really?" asked Messiter, simply.

"Yes. Woodcutters and all the rest of it. I'm quite one of the family already. They're lighting the fire and getting the dinner ready. Come down."

In a short time the crackling branches showed that Messiter was descending.

Imagine his disgust when he found Dick shivering up to his shins in snow.

"Oh, what a story!" he exclaimed; "you said there were woodcutters and a cottage, and how could you sell me like that?"

"Because I want you down here, Harry. It isn't time for thinking. We must put our shoulders to the wheel, unless we want to be frozen to death, and leave our bones to whiten in this forest."

"I'll work, Dick, if you'll only tell me what to do," replied Messiter.

"That's all I want. First of all, we must make a house."

"Out of what? We've got no tools."

"We don't want any," replied Dick; "our house will be one of snow."

"Won't it melt?" said Messiter.

"Not a bit of it. I shall leave a hole in the roof, to let the hot air escape, and you'll be surprised how warm you'll find it. The Esquimaux always live in igloos or snow huts. Fire away. Here is a place between four trees. Let that be the model. Mold the snow hard, and make your walls thick."

"All right," said Messiter, who began to recover his spirits; "I'll take this side. You take that."

"Very well," replied Dick, "and we'll see who is the best mason."

And they began with a will to make a snow house.

CHAPTER XI.

ARMOND'S ESCAPE.

WHEN Mr. Snarley sought the presence of the head master, his face wore a subdued, and even grave air.

He had a very bad headache, he was tortured with a fierce thirst, and he suffered all the evils of unaccustomed dissipation in their worst form.

He was ashamed of himself.

Once he had been betrayed into intoxication, and he came home dressed as a clown.

Again he had been tempted, and fell; the consequence being that he appeared before Mr. Simcox's astonished eye arrayed as a pantaloon.

He wondered what he would come home like if he did it a third time.

"You sent for me, sir," he exclaimed, as he entered the study. Mr. Simcox motioned him to a seat.

"I have had a troublesome visitor," he said.

"May I ask his name?"

"You may. It is Jackson."

"I only know one of that name, and he is an attendant at the gymnasium," said Mr. Snarley.

"That is the man."

"Does he want more money?"

"No; he asks for justice," said Mr. Simcox.

"Upon whom?"

"He alleges that he overheard a conversation this morning on the beach between Armond and Smith, in the course of which Armond admitted to Smith that he cut the ropes."

"Indeed! I always considered Lightheart the culprit," said Snarley.

"My suspicions also pointed in that direction, but Jackson declares that Armond read an extract from a diary he keeps, which fully detailed the crime."

"This is grave."

"Very," replied Mr. Simcox. "Jackson demands that I shall obtain the diary and disgrace Armond, while doing justice to Lightheart."

"It seems a proper request."

"No doubt, and our duty is clear," Mr. Simcox rejoined. "But it is no secret to you, Snarley, that I am under considerable obligation to Armond's father."

"You have hinted as much, sir."

"I owe him money. If he were to withdraw his son, I could no longer work out the sum. I should have to pay, and I am not in a position to do so."

"Precisely," said Snarley, "I see where the shoe pinches."

"Perhaps Lightheart may never return. He has not been openly accused of, or punished for cutting the ropes of the trapeze."

"No."

"Therefore he has not much cause for grievance," pursued Mr. Simcox.

"Certainly not," Snarley answered.

"Then again, we have Armond the head of the school."

"We have."

"He supplies us with valuable information which enables us to know what is going on among the boys."

"He is our spy, in fact."

"I do not like the word spy. It is harsh," said Mr. Simcox. "But we will say that he assists us in performing duties that are arduous."

"Quite so: I stand corrected, sir."

"Now, having made Armond what he is, it would seriously embarrass us to disgrace him and humiliate him in the eyes of the school."

"So it would. Let us take no notice of the attendant's communication," Snarley rejoined.

"That course does not recommend itself to me; it savors too much of favoritism. I must see Armond and speak to him, but I think it would be as well if you were to see him first."

"With pleasure, sir."

"If that diary did not exist, there would be no proof against him," Mr. Simcox went on.

"For my part, sir, I don't believe there is such a thing. It is a malicious invention on the part of Jackson."

"Very likely. Go and make your investigations, Mr. Snarley."

The usher departed to do so and found Armond on the beach.

"Morning, sir," said Armond. "Did you enjoy yourself at the Swiss Gardens?"

"Not much. There were causes that—ahem!—interfered with my pleasure. By the way, Armond, it is a bad plan to keep a diary; don't tell me you keep a diary?"

"Why, sir?" asked Armond, surprised.

"Mr. Simcox has been told that you have written incautious admissions in a book."

"As to what?"

"That unfortunate affair of the trapeze ropes."

Armond turned deadly pale.

"Who is his informant?" he asked.

"Jackson, the attendant at the gymnasium. The fellow says he was lying on the beach this morning, and he heard you reading a confession to Smith. It is an absurd story, is it not?"

"Ridiculous," replied Armond, growing whiter still.

"Mr. Simcox is determined to sift the matter, and compel the production of the diary; but if you haven't got one and it can't be found, the matter falls to the ground, and there is an end of it. Now, the question is, do you or do you not keep a diary?"

"I will gladly give you the keys of my box, my desk, and my locker, sir, and if you can find one, you are welcome."

He handed Mr. Snarley a bunch of keys as he spoke.

"Ah! that is fair and straightforward," said the usher. "I am glad you have met me in this spirit. I will go at once to Mr. Simcox," replied the usher.

"Thank you, sir," replied Armond.

He breathed a sigh of relief.

"Excuse me for troubling you, Armond, but this Jackson is a vindictive, troublesome fellow."

"Let me see him if he comes again troubling Mr. Simcox."

"Your request is a very proper one, and shall be preferred in the right quarter," Snarley replied, shaking his hand.

When he was gone, Armond turned to Smith and said:

"A narrow shave that."

"Very," replied Smith.

"Fancy the sneaking beggar being behind the bathing-machine and listening to what we said."

"Fancy," repeated Smith.

"Simcox doesn't want to have a row with me because of his transactions with my father, and he sent Snarley to talk to me. I can see that. Cleverly done, wasn't it?"

"By Snarley, you mean—to put you on your guard?"

"Yes."

"You'll get out of it all right, now; but what shall you do with the diary," said Smith.

"I don't know."

"Throw it in the sea, or destroy it."

"No," replied Armond, "I don't want to do that; there are lots of things in it I want to remember and look at. I shall hide it."

"Where?" said Smith.

"That's the question; tell me a good place."

"You know the old sycamore tree in the playground?"

"Yes."

"There is a sparrow's nest high up in the branches; we might put it there for the present," said Smith.

"A brilliant idea. The leaves will hide it."

"So will the stuff the nest is made of," answered Smith.

"Let's go at once and do it. I can climb up the tree," said Armond.

The boys rose and went home.

There were only a few boys in the playground, playing at marbles and leap frog; and they did not see anything extraordinary in Armond's climbing up the tree.

He soon reached the old sparrow's nest, and safely deposited the diary on the hay of which it was made.

Then he descended, feeling that he had baffled his enemies for the present.

"That's a weight off one's mind," he muttered.

Before dinner Mr. Snarley sought him again.

"Well, sir, are you satisfied?" asked Armond.

"Perfectly, my dear boy. Mr. Simcox and I acquit you of the base charge brought against you by Jackson," said Snarley.

"Thank you, sir," Armond said, with a hypocritical smile.

"He is a malicious scoundrel."

"Kick him out, sir, if he comes here again telling lies."

"Depend upon it, he will go out quicker than he came in. I congratulate you upon coming so well through the ordeal."

Armond again thanked the usher, and his face was radiant with smiles.

Calling to Smith, he said:

"Make us a back. I feel so jolly that I want to do something."

Smith bent down, and he leaped over him with agility; then he went down, and Smith cleared him, crying, "tuck in your two-penny," and so they amused themselves till dinner-time.

The day passed, and no news came of Lighthouse.

All the boys talked about him and Messiter.

Some made bets. The betting showed that the school did not think much of his chance of getting back again.

The betting was six to four against his return.

CHAPTER XII.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

WHEN the snow-house was finished, a hole was left for the boys to crawl in at.

Dick climbed up the pine tree and brought down the stores from the car.

The provisions were not sufficient to last long, and they ate sparingly.

Both the boys were so fatigued that all they wanted was to go to sleep.

Lying close to one another for warmth they soon fell asleep.

The day and night had passed when Dick awoke, fancying he heard voices.

"Did you speak, Harry?" he said.

"No," replied Messiter, waking up and rubbing his eyes.

"I'd have sworn I heard a voice, and an English voice too. Hark!"

They listened.

"Down, Nero! Down, lad, down!" said someone.

"There!" cried Dick, "didn't I tell you so?"

In an instant he was out of the snow-cave, followed by Messiter.

Through the trees Dick beheld a thick smoke curling upward.

Going toward it he came upon an open glade in the forest.

Here were two men.

Their guns were lying on the ground, and near them was a fine deer, quite dead, by which a handsome hound sat on his haunches.

One man was attending to the fire, which began to blaze up.

The other had just lighted a pipe, and sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree, was smoking placidly.

They had the unmistakable appearance of gentlemen, and English gentlemen too.

Dick could hardly believe the evidence of his senses.

"Who are they?" whispered Messiter.

"I don't know; let's give them a cheer."

"All right, lead off."

"Hip, hip, hip, hurrah!" cried Dick, at the top of his voice.

Messiter joined in with the shout in a manner that did credit to his lungs.

The strangers started up and looked around them wonderingly.

With a laugh, Dick advanced.

They stared at him as if they had seen a spirit.

"Hullo, my lad," said one, "where did you spring from? I needn't ask your nationality, for only an English boy could give a hearty hurrah like that."

"You're right for once in your life," replied Dick. "I'm English to the backbone, and so are you, if I'm not mistaken."

"We are."

"What are you doing here?" cried Dick, sootily.

"We are sportsmen, and have come over to

fish and shoot. I am Captain Sanderson, and my friend there, who is trying his hand at fire making, is Major Wilcox."

"Proud to make your acquaintance," said Dick, cool as ever.

"But now, my lad, what brought you here?" said Captain Sanderson.

"Not inclination, I can tell you."

"How long have you been here?"

"About eighteen hours."

"What are you doing in this forest?"

"Nothing."

"You're a very funny boy," said Captain Sanderson, puzzled. "How did you get there?"

"In a balloon," replied Dick.

"Look here, my lad," said the captain; "if we are to be friends, you mustn't chaff me."

"I'm not chaffing, and I feel perfectly independent. I'm a householder, and if you like to come and have a bottle of champagne or a glass of brandy, you're welcome."

"A what are you?"

"A householder, and I neither pay rent nor taxes."

"Really," said Major Wilcox, "this is a most extraordinary boy, and, by Jove, there is another of them!"

It was Messiter he saw.

"Oh!" said Captain Sanderson, "you have a companion."

"In misfortune," replied Dick.

"Well," said the captain, with a good-natured smile, "let's go to your house and have this bottle of champagne. I hope it's good."

"First-rate. It's Clicquot," answered Dick.

"Will you come, major?" asked the captain.

"Oh! yes, with pleasure."

The sportsmen rose and followed Dick a few yards, when they saw the snow-house.

"You can go inside if you like, but I shouldn't advise you to. It's damp, and not too big," said Dick.

"As you please."

"Harry, bring out the chammy and some glasses," continued Dick.

Messiter did so, and Dick poured out the wine, which the travelers drank with a relish.

"Now, come," said Major Wilcox; "tell us all about yourselves."

"First of all, tell me where I am," replied Dick.

"Don't you know where you are?"

"No more than Adam."

"Really?"

"Really," said Dick. "If you were to tell me this was the moon, and you was the man in it, I shouldn't like to disbelieve you."

"It's Norway, and this is a forest near Helsingfors," replied Captain Sanderson.

"We must have come a precious long way in a short time."

"If you would only condescend to be a little more communicative, we should get on better."

"All right. You shall hear our pitiful story," answered Dick.

He accordingly told them their names, what school they were at, how they contrived to get a day's holiday, and how, after playing tricks upon the usher, they started on their wild career in a balloon.

"Upon my word, Master Lighthouse," exclaimed Captain Sanderson, "you are a very promising youth."

"Always so considered," replied Dick.

"You'll make a noise in the world."

"Such has been my pious intention, captain."

"I'll tell you what," said Major Wilcox, "that opening the valve was a very plucky thing. You may think yourself lucky that you got down."

"So I do, major," said Dick; "and I hold myself still more fortunate in meeting you."

"I don't know how you would have found your way out of the forest if you had not. We return to England in a day or two in my yacht, our shooting tour being over."

"I suppose you won't object to give us a passage. We can make ourselves useful as cabin boys or something," Dick remarked.

"We must do our best for you, eh, Sanderson?"

"Certainly, but they must promise not to run away with the yacht," replied the captain, laughing.

"I hope," said Dick, "that my character will absolve me from any such base suspicions. By the way, had you good sport?"

"Tolerably."

"Only too! sorry for that. Pity we didn't meet you sooner," said Dick, with his usual impudence. "However, I see you've killed a deer; and the presumption is you're going to cook it."

"Yes."

"Well put on some extra steaks for Messiter and me, and when it's ready, give us a hail. I must go into the house and see to my domestic arrangements. Ta-ta! see you again at dinner-time."

The sportsmen laughed immoderately, and Dick crawled into the house, followed by Messiter.

"Oh! Dick," said Messiter, when they were alone, "won't you offend them?"

"Not a bit of it. It doesn't do to be too civil to people," replied Dick.

"Doesn't it?"

"Not a bit of it. They'll like us all the better."

Messiter was silent.

"I'm a lucky beggar," continued Dick, gleefully. "I always fall on my legs."

"It's very fortunate we met those two gentlemen who happened to be shooting in these forests."

"We may look forward to a spree now," Dick continued. "They're swells, and they're sure to have a nice yacht. Won't it be jolly?"

"Rather; I'm not sorry we ran away in the balloon, now."

"We," repeated Dick, scornfully, "you had nothing to do with it. I believe when you grow up to be a man, you'll tell the story and say you did it all."

"No, I shan't," replied Messiter, sulkily.

"Don't cut up rough, Harry; you may if you like," said Dick. "But I'll tell you why I crept in here. I felt so awfully pleased at meeting those fellows and seeing a way out of our scrape that I wanted to be alone."

"Will it take us long to get home?" asked Messiter, quickly recovering his good humor.

"Ten days or a fortnight, I expect."

The boys had not been long together in their snow-house before they heard the captain's stentorian voice exclaim:

"Dinner is ready, young gentlemen."

Dick took the last two bottles of wine, one in each hand, and went outside.

Messiter carried some knives and forks and plates, which had formed part of the private stock of the balloon proprietor.

Though not handsome, they were useful.

The venison steaks were very tender and done to a turn.

In a very short time, the boys and the gentlemen became the best of friends.

"For the last two seasons," exclaimed Captain Sanderson, "my friend and I have made it our custom to come here for the season, and though we have to rough it, we like it."

"Where do you live?—if it's not an impertinent question," asked Dick.

"You're improving, my young friend," said the major.

"Why?" replied Dick.

"Because of the last part of your sentence. I shouldn't think it mattered to you whether your questions were impertinent or not."

"I'm particular with gentlemen," answered Dick. "Cads, I must confess, I don't study much."

"We live at the forester's cottage, about six mile's distant," replied the captain, "and if you will come with us, we will see what we can do in the way of rugs and blankets. To put you up beds is out of the question."

"Don't mention it," replied Dick, waving his hand grandly; "when we're camping out, we rise superior to beds."

"Glad to hear it," replied the major, with a smile.

"Are you ready? Follow us. March," exclaimed Captain Sanderson.

Dick found the cottage much more comfortable than he expected, and good fires kept out the cold.

The days passed quickly, and at last he and Messiter went down to the coast with their kind friends, and got on board the yacht which was to take them to England.

Captain Sanderson very kindly telegraphed to Messrs. Simcox & Markwell, and to the Rev. Mr. Lighthouse, informing them of the escape of the boys, as well as to Messiter's father.

The voyage was pleasant, though a little rough.

The gentlemen were going to the Isle of Wight, and they promised to land the boys as they passed Brighton.

"We draw such a light draught of water," said Captain Sanderson, "that we can put you off at the Chain Pier."

"Thank you," said Dick.

He got Messiter alone, and he remarked to him—"We shall pass Kemp Town."

"What of that?" asked Messiter.

"Consequently we shall go by Harrow House."

"Well?"

"Isn't this cannon a little beauty?" was Dick's only reply.

He touched the smooth polished barrel of a cannon which stood on the stern part of the vessel.

"I mean to load this, Harry," he continued.

"What with?"

"What with? Why powder and ball, you donkey."

"Captain Sanderson won't let you fire it."

"Yes, he will. I'll tell him I want to salute old Simcox, and he won't know I've slipped a ball in," replied Dick.

"But if you fire at the house you may kill somebody," said Messiter, doubtfully.

"No. I shall fire, as the sailors say, 'between wind and water,' that is, above their heads, just to make the furniture rattle and alarm them a bit," said Dick.

"Don't do it, Dick; there is a good fellow; you might kill somebody."

"Think so?"

"I do indeed, please promise me that you won't," pleaded Messiter.

"Well, then, there will be no harm in picking off the stack of chimneys, will there?" said Dick.

He thought he had arrived at a solution of the difficulty.

Having got the idea into his head, he must fire at something.

"Yes," he added. "I'll have old Fireworks' chimneys. Won't he jump? He will think the sweeps have made a mistake and come to the wrong house."

He laughed immoderately at the idea, and Messiter joined in his merriment.

CHAPTER XIII.

FIRING A SALUTE.

MR. SIMCOX, his wife, and Mr. Markwell were at breakfast, Mr. Snarley had come in to make a report about some trifling breach of discipline.

The windows were open, and Mr. Snarley looking out on the sea remarked that there was a very fine yacht in the offing.

He had not very clearly defined ideas as to what he meant by the "offing."

It was a nautical term, and as every one else was as ignorant as himself as to his meaning, it passed off very well.

"Yes," said Mr. Simcox, "a remarkably fine yacht. Nice thing to have a yacht of one's own."

"Hi should think so," observed Mrs. Simcox; "a life on the ocean wave is poetical, likewise innocent and charming."

"I suppose," said Mr. Markwell, "that those scamps of boys will be home soon. It is

some days since we received their telegram announcing their descent in Norway."

"Hawful thing to be run away with in a balloon," said Mrs. Simcox.

"Very much so, madam," replied Mr. Markwell.

"I don't think they were so much to blame, hafter hall," continued Mrs. Simcox.

"Why not, my dear?" said her husband.

"Hit was Snarley has frightened them."

"Excuse me, ma'am," said Mr. Snarley.

"Lighthouse forged his father's handwriting to begin with. He played me innumerable tricks into the bargain, and he deliberately cut the ropes that bound the balloon to the earth. Not to blame, indeed! I don't see how a boy could behave worse."

"I am of Snarley's opinion," said Mr. Simcox.

"And I also," chimed in Mr. Markwell.

"What ought we to do with him then? They must be punished, or supposing we let Messiter off, as acting under Lighthouse's orders, what is to be done to him?" asked Mr. Simcox.

"Flog him," replied Mr. Markwell.

"I don't believe he cares for that. He's as hardened as an habitual criminal, but something must be done with him."

"Discard the cane, and use the birch in the presence of the whole school; that will shame him. There will be mental punishment there; the disgrace will have more effect than the actual pain, which will be great enough," urged Mr. Markwell.

"I am not in favor of the use of the birch, because I consider it a degrading punishment," said Mr. Simcox.

"Just the very reason why you should adopt it in this instance."

"Perhaps you are right. I will try it. Lighthouse shall be birched."

"And Messiter?" asked Mr. Snarley.

"We will cane him. There shall be a difference between them. You, Markwell, shall cane Messiter, and I will flog Lighthouse."

"That will strike terror into their souls," replied Mr. Snarley, who was delighted at the decision.

"Hit's a mercy they weren't killed in that balloon," observed Mrs. Simcox.

"It is indeed," replied her husband. "I never expected to hear of them again."

"Perhaps that yacht out there, in what Mr. Snarley so properly calls the offing, is the very one in which they are returning," said Mr. Markwell.

"Shouldn't wonder," replied Simcox, "they said their new friends would bring them home in a ship."

Suddenly there was a loud report; a heavy body seemed to rush into the room just over the heads of those assembled.

A crack was heard, and part of the wall behind Mrs. Simcox fell down.

"Hoh!" she said. "Bless us and save us! What can it be? His it a hearthquake?"

"That was a shot, madam. It is the Prussians," said Mr. Markwell, trembling violently.

Snarley crept under the table, and groaned in anguish of spirit.

"My opinion is," said Simcox, "that it's a bombardment. The Americans have sent a privateer over to exact reparation for the Alabama claims."

"Hi shall faint," exclaimed Mrs. Simcox.

"Hoh, Lor! to think they should start with our house, when there are so many hothers in the town."

As no other shot followed the first, Mr. Simcox rose from his seat, and going to the wall, examined the damage.

A shot had firmly embedded itself in the brickwork, part of which had fallen.

It was not propelled by a very large charge of powder, or it would have done more mischief.

The crash was occasioned more by the smashing of a handsome engraving, through which it had passed.

Fragments of glass lay around in all directions.

It was a Providential mercy that the ball had not been aimed lower, or it would have taken off the head of Mrs. Simcox, who sat directly in the line of fire.

The ball had come in through the open window, and Mr. Simcox, after a moment's reflection, felt convinced that it was either an accident or a mistake.

We were at war with nobody, therefore it could not have been a bombardment.

"Don't be alarmed," he said, as he held some salts under his wife's nose; "we shall have no more of it."

On hearing these reassuring words, Snarley emerged from his place of concealment.

Mrs. Simcox, with a woman's quickness of perception, exclaimed:

"Hit's that himp!"

"That what, madam?" asked Mr. Markwell, who was very pale.

"That Lighthouse," she continued. "He must be on board this yacht, and he's fired a cannon hat hus."

"However that may be," said her husband, "I shall go at once to the police, or the coast-guard, or somebody, and find out who fired the shot. It is not only that our lives have been placed in jeopardy; the damage must be paid for."

He rose, and putting on his hat, went out to make a complaint at the Town Hall.

When he neared the Chain Pier, he was surprised to see Captain Sanderson, whom he did not know, walking between two boys whom he did know.

These were Lighthouse and Messiter.

"That's our governor," whispered Dick stopping abruptly.

Mr. Simcox said:

"I see you with two of my pupils, sir, and will venture to address you, though I have not the honor of your personal acquaintance."

"My name is Sanderson," replied Dick's friend "and I have come to restore the runaways."

"So far I am much obliged to you," continued Mr. Simcox. "But I have a grave charge to make. What I presume to be your yacht, has fired?"

"I know what you mean, my good sir," interrupted Captain Sanderson, "and I am prepared to tender you an explanation; in fact, I was on my way to your house to do so."

"Very good," said Mr. Simcox, relaxing the muscles of his face.

"We intended to fire a salute, but by a mistake a ball was put in the gun, and I trust sincerely no one has been injured."

"No one but?"

"Allow me. It is, indeed, fortunate that no one was hurt, and I am sincerely rejoiced to hear it. Accept my hearty congratulations, and at the same time my apologies, for the carelessness of my men."

"Then the yacht belongs to you?"

"It does," replied Captain Sanderson.

"Consequently you are responsible for the damage done to my property."

"Of course. Mention the amount and I will give you a check on the spot."

Mr. Simcox permitted himself to smile.

Extending his hand he exclaimed:

"My dear sir, my very dear sir, if you will allow me to call you so, you are a gentleman—I may add, a perfect gentleman."

"Thank you for the compliment," returned Captain Sanderson, smiling, "and now may I beg one favor?"

"By all means."

"You will not be too hard on my young friends here for their flight in the balloon."

Mr. Simcox looked grave.

"They have suffered a good deal from fright and exposure," continued the captain.

"That doesn't lessen the gravity of the offense of which they have been guilty," said Mr. Simcox.

"Possibly not."

"I must punish them, or the discipline in my school will be at an end. I may tell you

that Lighthouse is a very bad boy, and has, on various occasions, given me a great deal of trouble."

"I am sorry to hear that."

"You cannot be more sorry than I am when I relate the fact, sir," continued Mr. Simcox. "Messiter, his companion, may have been led away by Lighthouse; I am willing to admit that."

"Let them off this time, Mr.—"

"Simcox."

"Ah, thank you. I had forgotten your name," said the captain. "Now, to oblige me, Mr. Simcox, you will let them off this once."

"No, sir; I will not, and cannot," answered he head master of Harrow House School. "Lighthouse would only laugh at me behind my back."

"Oh, sir," said Dick.

"Hold your tongue, if you please, Master Lighthouse. I am not addressing my remarks to you," replied Mr. Simcox, severely.

Dick was silent.

"I have his father's authority, Captain Sanderson," the professor went on, "to adopt harsh measures with this boy."

"That is a crammer," said Dick in a low tone to Messiter.

Mr. Simcox turned round sharply.

"Did you speak?" he asked.

"No, sir; it was only the wind," answered Dick.

"Well," said Captain Sanderson, "I shall stay here a day or two—say at the 'Bedford.' Send me your bill for the damage the accidental discharge of a loaded gun from my yacht has caused in your house, and I will gladly pay it immediately."

"Thank you. The account shall be sent in a few hours," said Mr. Simcox.

"I take this opportunity of again expressing my regret at what has occurred."

"Don't mention it, sir. You have, I repeat, behaved like a gentleman."

"Will you let Messiter and Lighthouse come to breakfast with me before I leave?" asked the captain.

"I am sorry to be compelled to refuse you; they will not set foot outside the door of Harrow House School for some time to come."

"Well, you know best; but let them down easy," said the captain, good-naturedly.

"Pardon me," replied Mr. Simcox, stiffly. "I really must deprecate any interference between myself and my pupils."

"All right. I wish you good-morning," cried the captain.

He shook hands with the boys, and whispered to Dick, as he slipped a sovereign into his hand, "I did my best for you, old fellow."

"Thank you heartily," said Dick, who was touched by the kindness Captain Sanderson and Major Wilcox had shown him since their first meeting. "I shall never forget you."

"Ta-ta," said the captain, who turned round and walked back along the Parade.

When the captain was out of sight, Mr. Simcox's manner changed as if by magic.

He became angry and ferocious.

"Walk in front of me, you boys," he said, as if he was a policeman talking to a couple of pickpockets.

Dick took Messiter's arm and walked on quickly.

"We're in for it," whispered Messiter.

"That's safe. It's the Bank of England to a China orange," answered Dick.

"I don't care. They can't kill us."

"It will be all the same in a hundred years hence," said Dick.

"So it will, but I wish it was over," replied Messiter, with a sigh.

"Sanderson tipped me a sovereign."

"Did he? He's a brick."

"I should think he was too. I never met a better fellow in my life," answered Dick.

In a short time they reached Harrow House, and pushing them in at the door, Mr. Simcox said:

"Go into my study, boys, and wait until I come to you."

They did as they were told, and Mr. Simcox went to the breakfast-room to announce the arrival of the missing ones.

Mrs. Simcox and Mr. Markwell were pleased to hear that the boys had come back safe and sound.

In addition to this pleasure, they were further gratified at Captain Sanderson's promise to pay for the damage done to the house by the cannon ball.

"Mr. Snarley," said Mr. Simcox, "go to the school-room and prepare for the punishment of the delinquents."

"Yes, sir," replied Snarley.

"The birch is kept in my desk, you will remember, and you will find a cane there too. Make a little speech to the boys, and when all is ready, tell me."

"As soon as possible," said Snarley.

"An example shall be made this time, which will cause the whole school to quake," continued Mr. Simcox.

"Quake's the word, sir," said Mr. Snarley, as he left the room rubbing his hands, and smiling.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW BOY.

THE runaways were not kept long in suspense; they were brought into the school-room and passed through a double row of grinning boys. There is little compassion in the schoolboy's mind.

No one seemed to feel any pity for the sufferers.

Mr. Simcox made a little speech, in which he commented upon the bad conduct of Lighthouse.

Armond and Brabazon were called forward to hold Dick.

Mr. Simcox wielded the birch with an energy which soon produced an effect.

Dick struggled and roared, but all to no purpose.

His enemy, Armond, held him in vise-like grip, delighted at the torments inflicted upon the scapgrace.

At length, having received five-and-twenty strokes, and the birch being broken into twenty little bits, which lay scattered about the floor, the professor threw down the worn-out stump.

Dick rose, with a scarcely endurable sensation of tingling and smarting, and walked to his desk with tears in his eyes.

It was now Messiter's turn.

The latter was held by the collar of his jacket by Mr. Snarley, while Mr. Markwell administered a sound caning.

His cries were louder than Dick's; and at last, he too took his place, feeling dreadful sore and uncomfortable.

"Boys," said the professor, in his most awful voice, "let this be a lesson to you all. I trust that Lighthouse will for life remember the disgraceful punishment to which he has just been publicly subjected. Mr. Snarley, let the work of the day begin."

Soon all were engaged in the important business of lessons.

When twelve o'clock came, the boys went into the playground, and all of Dick's friends crowded around him to hear an account of his travels.

But Dick was in pain and sulky; he would not talk to any one.

For some days he did not get over the discipline to which he had been subjected.

It gradually faded away from his mind, however, and he became himself again, for his sense told him that Mr. Simcox had treated him only as he richly deserved.

The attendant at the gymnasium called upon the professor by appointment.

Mr. Simcox informed him curtly that no diary could be found in Armond's possession.

"You must have been mistaken in what you thought you heard," he said.

"No, sir, I was not," replied Jackson, indignantly.

"Then you invented this story to calumniate a very well-behaved young man."

"That's not true. You are in league with this Armond, but I'll find out the truth yet," replied Jackson.

"I wish nothing more," Mr. Simcox answered, with a bland smile. "Do so as speedily as possible, and you shall have my hearty thanks; and now, good-morning."

Thus dismissed, the "gym" went away dissatisfied, but unable to do any more at present. He was not idle, however, for he waited until an opportunity occurred of seeing Dick.

"If I tell him about the diary, maybe he'll find it," he said to himself, "and if he does, and we bring it home to this Armond, I'll make his father pay for it, and give me a sum of money to start me in life, or I'll ruin his character in a police-court, and at the same time clear Mr. Lighthouse, who is a gentleman, whatever they may say about him."

But as Dick was kept a close prisoner with Messiter for a fortnight, and not allowed to go out under any pretense whatever, he did not see him for some time, though he hung about when the other boys went out.

During Dick's absence a new boy had arrived.

His name was Albert Strange.

Being a peculiar sort of boy, he was called by everybody Strange Albert.

Dick soon remarked him, and said to Messiter:

"There's a new fellow."

"Yes," replied Messiter, "I've heard all about him. That's Strange Albert."

And he proceeded to tell him that he was considered eccentric, and got a good deal chaffed and teased by the other boys.

"What's that he's got on his arm?" continued Dick.

"Oh, that's his magpie."

"His what?"

"Tame bird—magpie—and a very clever bird too. You should hear him draw corks," said Messiter.

"Let's go over and talk to him."

They did so.

Albert Strange was sitting on a heap of stones in a corner of the playground, reading a book about natural history.

"What's your name?" said Dick.

"Albert Strange," replied a thin, pale, dark boy, with wonderfully piercing black eyes.

"No, it isn't; it's Strange Albert," replied Dick. "I shall have to lick you if you don't tell the truth."

The boy put his book down, after carefully marking the place where he had left off with a blade of grass.

"Let me alone, please," he said, "I don't interfere with anybody."

"You'd rather be friends than enemies?"

"Much rather, only I like to be by myself."

"So you shall. But you won't mind us talking to you now?"

"Oh, no, I like to talk," replied Strange Albert. "I'm only put out when fellows come and pull my ears or knock my cap off."

"Who does that?"

"Armond, and other boys too."

"I'll stop him at that game, if I catch him," said Dick.

"I wish you would, because I can't fight," said Strange Albert, eagerly. "I'm not strong, and I've not been taught to fight. My mother always told me not to."

"You are religious, I suppose?" observed Messiter.

"Not very. I wish I were more so; but I have sufficient liking for my Bible and reverence for holy things not to wish to have boys come to me and say bad words."

"Is that Armond also?" asked Dick.

"It's all of them. They know it annoys me, and they come and do it on purpose. Until you came to talk to me, this has been my only friend."

He pointed to his bird as he spoke.

It was a handsome full-grown magpie, which

sat with perfect confidence on its master's arm.

"What do you call him?"

"A magpie."

"I mean what is the animal's name?" said Dick.

"Oh, I call him Jock. Mind he don't peck you. He did Armond the other day," replied Strange Albert.

"Serve the beast right. I hope he hurt him."

"Armond says he will kill him. He declares he will buy a drawing-room pistol and shoot it. I hope he won't. I should miss poor Jock so."

He stroked his bird affectionately.

"It was a present to me from a cousin who had him before he died, and as my cousin and I were very fond of one another, I look upon Jock as a keepsake, as well as loving him."

"I should like to catch Mr. Cocky Armond trying to start a single feather of Jock," exclaimed Dick, angrily.

"What would you do?"

"I'd give him what for. He knows I can slog, and he fights shy of me."

"You look strong, and I like your face," said Albert; I study faces, and when I first saw you, I felt sorry you were going to be flogged."

"Oh, I've got over that now, and I'm ready for another," Dick rejoined with a laugh.

"There, that's what I have always argued. These degrading punishments do no good," cried Albert.

"Don't they?"

"Not a bit. They only harden a boy. You're hardened; you only laugh at it when it's over and the pain's gone."

"You're a funny fellow," said Dick, much amused. "Quite a philosopher; I don't wonder they call you Strange Albert."

"Never mind what they call me; I can afford to regard them with contempt, so long as they let me alone. What I want to ask you is this."

"Well, out with it," said Dick.

"Will you protect Jock from Armond?" continued Albert.

"Of course I will, and you too."

"Oh, never mind me; I can take care of myself and creep away into some hole or corner; but the bird, poor thing, cannot always be in safety, though he's got a nest or some place he goes to at night, and when I'm in school on the roof up there."

"Will he come when you call him?"

"Directly. I've only got to whistle, and say 'Jock, Jock,' and he comes fluttering down immediately," answered Albert.

"He's a nice bird. I like old Jock, and you may make your mind easy about him; Armond shan't touch a feather."

"Thank you. That assurance has made me feel more comfortable than I have been for a week past."

A little boy came up at this moment, and said:

"What do you want?"

"Not you," said Dick. "So you can make yourself scarce as soon as you like."

"I heard somebody say 'Armond,'"

"What of that? You're not Cocky Armond, B. B."

"I'm Armond's brother. Armond, junior, they call me. I've just come, and when I heard my name, I thought I'd say 'ere,'" replied the boy.

"'Ere, you illiterate little beggar, you've dropped something," said Dick in a tone of disgust.

"What's that?"

"Your H's," said Dick.

Armond, junior, who was a rough shaggy-haired boy of ten or eleven, with a heavy expression, and great ears sticking out from the side of his head, did not seem to understand the joke.

"Do you eat peas with your knife?" asked Messiter.

"Of course I do," replied Armond, junior.

"You're a treat. I must talk to you, Cocky,

junior," said Dick, "I'm glad we've met. Quite a gift, isn't he, Harry?"

"Rather," said Messiter.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LOST RING.

"WHAT did you come here for?" continued Dick.

"Cos father said he could put me in cheap, and it would make a gentleman and a scholar of me," replied young Armond.

"Your governor must have a very strong belief in miracles," said Dick.

"Why?"

"To believe that you could ever rise above a costermonger's barrow."

"We haven't got no barrows; ours is a shop, and a proper one, too, in the Commercial Road, Whitechapel," said Armond, junior, angrily.

"What's the price of tripe?" asked Dick, without laughing in the least.

Messiter and Albert were both smiling.

"We can't do the best, and give you the prime fat bits under eightpence a pound, though we know it's good, and have a name for it."

"So I should think. Well, you can send me two ounces," replied Dick.

"Is this 'ere a game? 'Cos if it is, don't you have no game on with me."

"I'm perfectly serious. Write home and give the order."

"My big brother can punch," continued the young Armond, "and I'll tell him of you."

"Do. I shall be so pleased," replied Dick.

"What are you a-grinnin' at, ugly?" cried Armond, junior, furiously.

"Did you speak to me?" demanded Strange Albert.

"Yes, you with the bird on your arm. They call you the cranky lot, and I don't think they're far wrong."

Albert made no reply, but caressed his bird.

"You won't have no bird long," continued Armond, junior, spitefully.

"Shall I not?" said Albert.

"Not you."

"How's that?" asked Dick.

Armond, junior, winked and looked very knowing indeed.

"Would you like to know?" he answered.

"If I shouldn't, why did I ask?"

"I'll tell you. He won't have his beast of a bird long, 'cos my big brother's bought a gun to shoot it with!"

"Has he?" replied Dick; then take that and that, Mr. Cocky Armond, junior, and go and tell your big brother I licked you, and will serve him the same if he likes to come to me."

Dick had administered two good boxes on each ear, which made Armond, junior, howl wildly.

"Who are you 'itting of?" he whined.

"You," replied Dick.

"Do you take me for a chump of wood?"

"Go and learn grammar."

"That's what I came here for. If a chap has got nothing to learn, what does he go to school for? When I've been at Simcox's as long as you, I'll beat your head off," replied young Armond.

"Cut it! You smell of tripe. Be off, or I'll help you along," said Dick.

Shaking his fist at his tormentor, Armond, junior, ran away to pour his grief into his brother's sympathetic ear.

"Vulgar little boy," remarked Dick. "I'm glad he's gone."

"Did you hear what he said about Jock?" asked Albert.

"I did. We must look out."

The bell now rang for the boys to go in, and wash their hands before dinner.

"Fly away," said Albert, letting the magpie go.

Jock flew up in the air, and settled on a window ledge.

"That's Mrs. Simcox's room," said Dick.

"Look," cried Messiter, "the bird's gone right inside."

"So he has, but he ain't stopped long," answered Albert. "See, he's come out and has flown up to his nest, or whatever he's got on the housetop."

"I should like to go and explore his diggings," said Messiter.

In fact, the magpie had gone into Mr. Simcox's room, staying a brief space and then flying out again.

The boys ran indoors, and it being rather late, Dick did not stay to wash his hands, but went straight to the passage leading to the dining-room.

The smell of roast-mutton ascended from the kitchen.

"Mutton again!" muttered Dick, with a groan.

"Is it?" said Messiter, who was close behind him.

"You've followed my example, and mean to dine in your dirt," remarked Dick.

"Don't be a beast. We stopped watching that magpie so long, that I was afraid of being late."

"So was I, and Snarley has got his knife into us so hard that I don't like to give him half a chance."

"Nor I," replied Messiter. "But this mutton question is becoming serious. We've had mutton every day this week, and to-morrow's Saturday."

"So it is, Hurrah! for the half-holiday. I wonder if they'll let us out with the other boys."

"Not they."

"Then we'll have a dust up at home; get over the wall and see the girls, or something," answered Dick.

"Come on and let us eat our mutton, though I shall be ashamed to look a sheep in the face soon, because I've consumed so many of his kindred."

"Here's Mother Simcox," whispered Dick.

The mistress had just descended the stairs, having been up to her bedroom to "tidy herself up," as she expressed it, before giving the young gentlemen the dinner she had helped to prepare for them.

"Hoh! Lightheart," she said.

"What have I done now?" thought Dick.

"I shall slope," said Messiter, who vanished into the dining-room.

"Yes, ma'am," said Dick, respectfully.

"Hi have left my di'mond ring on the dressing-table in my room, or on the washstand when I cleaned myself. Run you up and bring it down."

"In your bedroom, ma'am?" said Dick.

"Yes. First-floor—looks on the play-ground. Be quick, there's a good boy; I can hear Mr. Simcox a-saying of grace balready."

Away ran Dick, three steps at a time, while Mrs. Simcox waited for him in the passage.

He found the bedroom and searched on the dressing-table, on the washstand, and on the floor, but he could discover no trace of the diamond ring.

"It isn't here," he muttered; "the old girl must have made a mistake."

He ran down stairs again as quickly as he could.

"Give it 'ere," said Mrs. Simcox.

"Please ma'am, I can't find it," he replied.

"Can't find it? Nonsense—you haven't looked."

"Yes, I have, ma'am—looked everywhere. It isn't in the room."

"You boys are hall 'arf stupid, I think, lately," she said in a tone of annoyance. "Go in to your dinner, do."

He entered the room, and she went up stairs to look for the missing ring.

"Late again, Lightheart," said the professor, who was carving a haunch of mutton.

"I've been on an errand for Mrs. Simcox, sir," said Dick.

"Oh, that alters the case. Sit down," said Mr. Simcox.

Presently a servant came in and told the professor that his wife was in hysterics up stairs.

Asking Mr. Snarley to be good enough to continue carving, the professor left the room.

He did not return till dinner was nearly over. Then he beckoned to Dick, and said:

"Lightheart, I want you."

Dick got up with his mouthful of pudding.

"What is it, sir?" he asked, following his master into the passage.

"You'd better not try those tricks on here, sir," replied Mr. Simcox.

"What tricks, sir?"

"It's a felony, mind that."

"What, sir?"

Dick was in a state of amazement.

"M. Simcox's ring is gone. She left it on the wash-stand. She remembers that distinctly; and we have proof that no one but you entered the room afterwards."

Dick colored up to his ears.

"What am I to understand by that?" he demanded.

"It comes to this. We know your character; there's nothing you won't do. You're the scapegrace of the school."

"Go on, sir," said Dick, calmly.

"And Mrs. Simcox is satisfied that you have stolen the ring."

Dick was about to say that he had never been called a thief before.

But he recollected Captain Hanger, and the attempt he had made on his father's cash-box.

He hung down his head, and was for a moment overwhelmed.

"What have you to say?" asked the professor, sternly. "Give up the ring," he added, as Dick made no answer, "and I will consider what is to be done with you."

Dick recovered himself.

"On my honor," he exclaimed, "I have never seen the ring. I did not know that Mrs. Simcox had such a thing."

"It was a present from me a day or two back, and a valuable one," said the professor.

The fact was that Captain Sanderson had given him a very handsome sum as compensation for the shot fired from his yacht.

Out of this money he had bought his wife the valuable diamond ring in question.

"I declare, solemnly, sir," continued Dick, "that I know no more than a baby about it."

"Do you adhere to your refusal to give it up?"

"How can I give up what I haven't got?"

"Don't argue the point with me," cried Mr. Simcox, sternly. "Will you confess?"

Dick remained obstinately silent.

Going to the dining-room door, Mr. Simcox cried:

"Mr. Snarley."

"Sir," replied the usher.

"I want you for a moment."

Mr. Snarley joined the professor in the passage.

"Mrs. Simcox has lost a diamond ring, and she accuses Lightheart of stealing it."

"Indeed, sir," said the usher.

"I am sorry to think any of my boys capable of committing such a base, dishonest action, but I consider it my duty to order him to be searched. Is there any objection to that course?"

"I can see none, sir."

"You may search me and welcome. I have nothing to conceal," said Dick.

Mr. Snarley carefully examined his pockets and even his boots.

Nothing was discovered.

"Now, sir," said Dick, triumphantly, "are you satisfied?"

"No, I am not; the suspicion lurks in my mind still," answered the professor.

"I will give you my word of honor"—began Dick.

"Never mind. I attach little value to your protestations," replied Mr. Simcox, severely, as he interrupted him. "You will join your companions, and depend upon it, I will investigate this mysterious affair to the end."

"It's very hard that"—

Mr. Simcox interrupted him again.

"Not a word," he said. "If I am wrong, I

am sorry, but you are such a bad boy, and appearances are so strong against you, that I cannot act in any different manner; go."

Dick walked away, holding his head proudly erect, for he knew that he was innocent.

"Mr. Snarley," said the professor.

"Sir."

"Watch that boy. Let Armond and Smith watch him also."

"Yes, sir," replied the usher.

"Do not let him out of your sight. He may have hidden the ring on the stairs, or somewhere, intending to fetch it at his leisure."

"He shall be carefully looked after," said Mr. Snarley.

"My wife feels the loss very much. She is hysterical. I must go to her," continued Mr. Simcox.

He walked away, but stopping suddenly, he added:

"Make no public accusation against Lightheart. We may be wrong after all. Keep the affair private for the present."

"I will do so, sir," replied Mr. Snarley.

Mr. Simcox rejoined his wife, who, with all a woman's impulsiveness, was certain and positive, and would take her oath, she said, that Lightheart had stolen her new ring.

No one else had been in the room.

She remembered leaving it the moment before on the wash-stand.

He was a scamp, and always "up to some larks or mischief."

Therefore he must be the thief.

Thus stood the case against our hero.

CHAPTER XVI.

ARMOND'S CRUELTY.

MESSITER was very anxious to know why Dick was called out of his room without being allowed to finish his dinner.

The boys were strolling about the playground for a little while before the school-bell rang, and Messiter ran up to his friend directly he made his appearance.

He saw in a moment that something had happened.

Dick's was an expressive countenance, and the observer could read in it what was passing in his mind.

"What's the row, Dick?" asked Messiter, much concerned.

"I don't like to tell you. It's infamous," replied Dick, who was as much angry as hurt.

"I'm your friend. Pour out your troubles; it will do you good. Has Armond been sneaking about anything?"

"No," replied Dick, curtly.

"Don't be sulky, old fellow. What is it?" continued Messiter.

"Mrs. Simcox has lost her ring."

"Then let old Simcox buy her another. I don't see much to be cut up about in that."

"They want to say I stole it."

"Oh, that's a horse of another color," answered Messiter, with a whistle. "I don't like that."

"You know the old girl sent me up for her ring?"

"No, I don't. I did not hear what she said to you," answered Messiter.

"Well, she did. That's what she stopped me for in the passage. I went to the bed-room and couldn't find it, and now they say I took it," repeated Dick.

"Who says so?"

"She does, and Simcox, too."

"Did Simcox tell you openly you were the—ahem—the thief? Excuse the question, but"—

"Yes, he did; and had me searched by Snarley," interrupted Dick, fiercely.

"Well, that beats everything; after that, as the astonished barber observed, 'In came a monkey to be shaved and a horse to have his toenails cut!'" cried Messiter.

"Don't chaff. I'm not in the humor for it," said Dick.

"Nor am I. They might say I was your

accomplice, and you passed it to me, as you and I sit next to one another at dinner."

"You're chaffing again. Shut up," replied Dick, angrily.

"Seriously, what are you going to do?" asked Messiter.

"Take a cold bath, I think."

"What's that, if I may make so bold as to inquire?"

"Go down to the end of the Chain Pier and jump into the sea," said Dick.

"Dick!" replied Messiter, anxiously.

"What now?"

"Are you in earnest?"

"Upon my word I am. I can't stand this sort of thing. It's past a joke."

"So it is, but you mustn't be rash."

"They put everything upon me. Half the fellows in the school say I cut the rope at the gymnasium, when Armond did it."

"It's your own fault. Give a dog a bad name, and"—

"Hang him you mean," said Dick, as Messiter hesitated. "Thank you, I did not expect this from you, Harry; but there is no such thing as friendship."

"Yes, there is, Dick. I'm your friend. I am indeed," Messiter hastened to say, "and I am really awfully sorry if any stupid chaff of mine has worried you."

"You've done it; you've said several hard things to me, and you know I'm in trouble, and not so well able to stand it as I should be at any other time."

"Forgive me. I'll never do it again," Messiter said.

He held out his hand, and Dick grasped it warmly.

He could not forget their long friendship, and he said:

"It's all right, old boy. Perhaps I'm cross. At all events, I believe you didn't mean it."

"I swear I didn't," said Messiter.

Armond happened to be standing near them and saw them shake hands.

Mr. Snarley had instructed him to watch Dick, and rather injudiciously told him what for.

"Quite affecting," said Armond, with a sneer.

"What's that you say?" asked Dick, turning sharply round.

"I like to see fellows affectionate."

"You shut up, or you can have another fight if you like," replied Dick, fiercely.

"Very well, form a ring; you're fond of rings, ain't you?" answered Armond, provokingly.

"Oh," said Dick, "who told you that?"

"Never mind. I know it, and how would you like me to tell all the fellows?"

"Tell them what you like; it will be false, that's all."

Armond put his hands in his pockets and went away whistling.

"He knows all about it," remarked Messiter.

"Of course. He's one of the spies of the establishment," answered Dick. "How I hate the beast."

"So do I; but I wouldn't provoke him, at least not just now. Perhaps he has been told of the ring affair, though others may not have heard of it."

Suddenly loud cries arose at another part of the playground.

A supplicating voice said:

"Oh, don't, Armond; please, please, don't!"

"Stand back!" replied Armond.

"Don't kill my poor bird," continued the voice. "I'll give you anything if you won't!"

"That's Strange Albert talking," said Dick.

"Yes," answered Messiter, "and Cocky Armond is going to shoot his bird. I saw him with a pistol this morning."

Dick sprang forward with a bound.

There was a dangerous light in his eyes.

Armond was standing under the tree in the playground, of which we have spoken already.

It was the very identical tree in which he had hidden his diary, after his conversation with Smith had been overheard by the gym, and

Mr. Snarley had so artfully put him on his guard.

Before Dick could reach him the mischief was done.

He held a pistol in his hand, and had pointed it at the magpie, which he had startled from its security on its master's arm.

Jock tried to reach the tree, and succeeded, but he perched within sight and range.

Armond pulled the trigger.

The bird uttered a loud cry, and fluttered down among the leaves, where he lay in a fork, making a great commotion.

"You cowardly rascal," cried Dick, seizing him by the collar and hurling him violently backwards.

Strange Albert was in the direst distress.

"Oh, climb up, some one," he exclaimed.

"I can't climb. I'll give anyone half a sovereign to get my bird down; perhaps he's not dead."

Armond rose to his feet, and approached Dick threateningly.

"How dare you assault me like that?" he asked.

"You're a disgrace to the school, you low bully," replied Dick.

"I should think *you* were. Who stole Mrs. Simcox's ring?" said Armond.

A crowd of boys had assembled, as boys always will when they think there is a row going on.

"What's that?" asked Brabazon.

"What I say," replied Armond.

"Did Lightheart steal Mrs. Simcox's ring?" inquired Fowler.

"Yes, he did, and he can't deny it. If you don't believe me, go and ask Mr. Simcox or Mr. Snarley."

Dick sprang upon Armond, and would have strangled him, had not Brabazon and Fowler interfered.

"I'll shove the lie down his throat," cried Dick, hoarse with passion.

"Pull him off," gasped Armond.

At length the big boys succeeded in doing so, and Dick stood pantingly glaring at his enemy.

Meanwhile, Strange Albert's distress at the injury done to his pet bird was pitiable to witness.

"It was my only friend," he sobbed; "oh, do go after it, some one."

Messiter, who was a good climber, ascended the tree, and speedily reached the fork where the bird was resting.

He took him up gently, and put him in his cap.

As he did so, he dislodged a book which was on the branch, and it fell to the ground.

Dick looked at it as it fell at his feet, and picked it up.

"Give that to me," said Armond, furiously.

"Why?" asked Dick, who had got over his passion.

He had shaken Armond well, and it had done him good.

"Because it's mine," said Armond, who was very pale.

"It fell out of the tree and I shall keep it," said Dick.

"It's my book. I put it there."

"I shall examine it, and if I find it is really yours, I'll give it you," Dick said; "but at present it goes into my pocket."

Armond tried to rush at him and tear it from his grasp.

Brabazon and Fowler interfered, saying:

"We'll have no fighting now."

"But he's got my book—my diary, I tell you."

"A tree is a funny place to keep a diary in, but if it is yours, and Lightheart will not give it you, complain to Mr. Snarley," said Fowler.

"There's the bell for school," said Brabazon.

"All in, all in," cried the boys.

With a sort of instinct Dick determined not to give up the book. At present he did not know the value of the prize which had fallen into his hands.

Armond had cruelly tried to kill Strange Albert's bird, but he had done himself an irreparable injury.

The diary he thought securely hidden, and which contained the confession of his villainy

in the gymnasium, had fallen into the possession of the very boy of all others he wished to keep it out of.

This was even-handed justice.

CHAPTER XVII.

DICK'S FIRST TRIUMPH.

MESSITER gave the wounded bird to Strange Albert, who examined it carefully.

As far as he could ascertain, it was not much injured.

A shot had apparently struck its right wing and crippled it.

He took it into school with him, and made it a nest in his locker, which he propped open with a ruler to let the air in.

Most of the boys thought it a great shame that Armond should wantonly shoot the bird, and Albert had their sympathy.

In the middle of the school, the magpie, not liking the confinement, stepped out of the locker, with his wounded wing hanging by his side, and walking up the room, made a peculiar noise, as if he was drawing corks.

"What is that?" said Mr. Simcox, who was in the midst of a scientific discussion with the head of his class.

Albert rose and replied:

"It's my magpie, sir."

"How dare you bring the creature into school to disturb our studies? Have I not cautioned you all against such practices, which are subversive of all discipline? If boys will keep pets, let them provide proper places for them, or I shall cancel my permission for them to have any pets at all," said the professor.

"I couldn't help bringing him in with me, sir," exclaimed Albert.

"How was that?"

"He was so much hurt. I don't want to tell tales of anybody, but if you ask Armond, senior, he will tell you all about it, sir," continued Albert.

Armond was in the professor's class, and looking at him, Mr. Simcox said:

"What is the meaning of this?"

Armond remained silent.

"I'll tell you, sir, since Armond won't speak," exclaimed Brabazon.

"Well?"

"The bird is Strange's property, and he thinks a great deal of it. Armond bought a small pistol to kill it. Just before school he fired at it, and wounded it in the wing."

"I dare say Armond had some good reason for doing so," replied Mr. Simcox, who had just borrowed some more money from Armond's father, and wished to screen him if possible.

"Yes, I had, sir. The bird was a nuisance, and I thought Strange would be bringing it into school some day to annoy you," answered Armond.

"Ah! just so. I am glad to see that one of my boys, at least, has some consideration for me in my arduous duties," said Mr. Simcox.

"If boys are encouraged to keep pets, we shall have some one starting a tame snake or a tiger cub," continued Armond.

"Quite so. The school will become a beast show. Very good. However, the bird seems harmless enough. Do not shoot at it again."

"No, sir," replied Armond.

"You may carry your zeal for me too far."

"I did not wish to hurt the bird, sir," Armond said, hypocritically. "I was only trying to do my duty, and make things pleasant for you."

"Exactly. I understand. Go on with your lesson, and you, Strange, take your bird away. Put it in the playground. We cannot have it making those odd noises here."

Strange Albert got up and tenderly took his pet away, making it a bed on some coats in the lavatory.

Dick was highly indignant at the favoritism shown to Armond.

"If any one else had done half so much," he whispered to Messiter, "he would have been caned within an inch of his life."

"Armond never gets into a row for anything he does," replied Messiter.

"No. Because he sneaks and crawls up to the masters."

"Silence in class," cried Mr. Simcox; "no talking there?"

Presently all was quiet, and strange Albert returned.

He had oiled the bird's wing, and it seemed more comfortable.

Dick was very anxious for school to be over, because he wanted to have a look at Armond's diary.

More out of a feeling of fun and mischief than anything else.

At present he did not suspect the value of its contents to him:

Armond was also anxious to get out of school, for he hoped he could bully or coax Dick into giving him back the book.

At last books were shut up, and there was a rush for the playground.

Armond and some of his friends collected together to talk the matter of the bird over.

"I'd make sure of him next time," said one.

"So I will," replied Armond. "Mr. Simcox told me not to shoot him, but he didn't say anything about wringing his neck."

"If you do, I'll wring yours, you coward," replied Dick, who was passing by.

"You'd better shut up," said Armond. "I know too much about you."

"I shall treat you with contempt," continued Dick. "I won't talk to you; but I warn you, if you cross me or hurt Strange Albert's bird, I'll give you something you won't forget in a hurry."

"Two can play at that game," Armond answered. "But I don't want to have a row with you, under the peculiar circumstances in which you are placed."

"What do you mean?" asked Dick, flushing.

"Only this. If what is alleged against you can be proved, you ought to be cut by the whole school, for you are not a fit associate for any of us."

Dick clenched his fists, but he kept his temper.

"What's that, Armond?" asked three or four boys in a breath.

"I can't tell you now. Perhaps Mr. Simcox will let you all know soon. Lightheart understands me perfectly; but, as I said before, I would rather be his friend until he is proved guilty."

"Look here, you fellows," exclaimed Dick. "I've got nothing to be ashamed of, because I know I'm innocent, but I would rather you heard all about it at once than be prejudiced by Armond's insinuations. If I had really committed a murder he couldn't say more."

"About what?" asked Fowler, who had joined the group.

"This is it," Dick went on; "Mrs. Simcox left her diamond ring in her bed-room just before dinner."

"Well."

"She sent me up stairs for it, I couldn't find it anywhere, and she says I must have taken it."

"Stolen it, you mean," put in Armond.

"By Jove! you will have it; will you?" said Dick.

He dashed out his fist to strike Armond, but the latter ducked his head, and the blow missed him.

"Dodged you that time," said Armond, smiling.

"Don't you fight now," said Fowler. "Have it out in the fields next time we go out, if you must mill; the masters will only come and stop it here."

"You're right," answered Dick.

"It's a very funny thing that they should say you took the ring," remarked Brabazon.

"So it is," observed Fowler.

Gradually the boys dropped away and left Dick standing by himself, as if they did not like his companionship.

Armond approached him.

"*Pax*, Lightheart?" he exclaimed.

"I can't have any *pax* with you," replied Dick, stubbornly.

"You can't say I put it about. You told of the ring being lost yourself."

"It was your sneering that made me do it; so that's just as bad as if you had spoken outright. It will be all over the school now in half an hour."

"Never mind; if you're innocent, it will be all right."

"If! Confound your impudence! You know I'm innocent," cried Dick.

"How should I know it?" asked Armond.

"Stand back, or I shall strike you, and when my monkey's up, I hit hard."

"Will you give me my diary?" asked Armond.

"No, I won't, that's flat."

"A fellow must be a beastly cad to keep another fellow's private diary," said Armond, biting his lips.

"Perhaps I'm everything that is bad. We shall know some day who the villain is. At all events, I've got your diary, and I mean to stick to it for the present."

With this, Dick defiantly walked away, leaving Armond much annoyed, and wondering how he could get the tell-tale book into his possession again.

"I was a double-distilled ass," he muttered, "to leave it up that tree. Hang the bird for falling there. Hang Messiter for climbing and dislodging the book. Hang everything, hang everybody."

Dick walked away, and stood moodily leaning against the wall.

Suddenly he heard a voice say:

"Hi!"

"He looked around and could see no one."

"Hi! sir," continued the voice.

This time he looked up.

He saw perched on the wall a figure that he knew well.

It was Jackson, the attendant at the gymnasium.

"What do you want?" asked Dick, who was not in a humor to speak to anyone.

"Can I say a few words to you, sir?"

"Yes, spin along."

"I've been looking for you everywhere, sir," continued Jackson.

"You knew where to find me. They've kept me in lately; that's why you did not see me out."

"Mr. Armond, sir, cut the rope."

"That's stale news," replied Dick.

"Yes, it is to us, sir," replied Jackson, "but we couldn't prove it, and we can now."

Dick's face lighted up.

"How?" he demanded.

"It's written down in his diary, sir. I was lying on the beach, and I heard him tell Mr. Smith that he had made a confession of it in his diary, which he had hidden. If any one can find it, you can."

Dick's heart beat tumultuously.

At last he saw a way of clearing his character from one charge.

"Go on," he said.

"I saw Simcox, sir," continued Jackson, "and he said he had searched Mr. Armond's locker, and there was no such thing as a diary in it, therefore I am sure it must be hidden somewhere."

Stretching out his hand, Dick said:

"Take that. I have just found it. If it is the diary you speak of, examine it, and see Mr. Simcox with a witness."

Jackson took it gladly.

"This is a slice of luck," he cried, joyfully. "Things are coming all right at last. Hurrah!"

"Don't forget the witness."

"Not I, sir. I'll take the landlord of the house where I'm lodging; and now good-by. We'll clear it all up. God bless you, sir," said Jackson.

The next moment he had dropped off the wall and disappeared.

Armond had watched this interview from a distance, and came up to Dick quickly.

"Who was that you were talking to?" he asked.

"That's my business," answered Dick, with a triumphant smile.

"Wasn't it Jackson, the gym?"

"You are at liberty to think so, if you choose."

"What did you give him?" persisted Armond.

"Your diary," answered Dick, with a grin.

Armond became deadly pale.

"Which is the worst?" asked Dick, pursuing his triumph, "the fellow who deliberately cuts a rope with the intention of maiming or killing another, or the one who is wrongfully suspected of stealing a ring?"

"You're in league with that fellow," replied Armond, savagely. "I'll go and ask Mr. Simcox."

"Cut away, Cocky. You're in for it this time, or I'll eat my hat," cried Dick, laughing.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ADVANTAGE OF BEING A FAVORITE.

In the evening Mr. Simcox sent for Mr. Snarley.

The latter found the professor in his study, smoking a cigar, and preparing to look over a pile of exercises.

"Sit down, Snarley; take a cigar, and help yourself to some sherry, which you will find in the cheffonier."

Mr. Snarley did so.

The sherry was good, and he took two glasses, then a third.

"Fine wine, that?" said Mr. Simcox, rather blankly, as he saw his sherry disappear rapidly.

"Capital; sir, I never wish to drink better."

"Armond's father sent it me. A very good man is that," replied Mr. Simcox; "you know that he accommodates me in the way of money sometimes, Mr. Snarley."

"I have heard you say so, sir."

"But the worst of it is that he will deduct a certain amount from the bill, and make me take it out in wine and pictures. Look at those in the corner. There is a Raphael, and a Titan, and a Teniers."

"Not genuine, I should think, sir," replied Mr. Snarley, eyeing the paintings critically.

"Possibly not. But that is not what I wanted to talk to you about. I have had a visit from Armond, and from that gymnasium fellow, Jackson."

"Indeed, sir, I thought that affair of the rope was forgotten."

"So did I," said Mr. Simcox. "I was mistaken, however, for the fellow has found Armond's diary, in which he was foolish enough to put down every thing that happened, and in it he finds an account of cutting ropes."

"I am sorry to hear that, for I didn't think Armond capable of such a thing."

"He's the son of a bill-discounter, and a Whitechapel man. We do not expect a high standard of honor from such a direction," said Mr. Simcox, cynically.

"What shall you do?"

"That is just what I wanted to consult you about."

"Send him away," suggested Mr. Snarley.

"I cannot do that, because the money I owe his father would become due if I sent the son away; therefore, expelling him is out of the question."

"It's all that wretched boy Lighthouse's fault," said Mr. Snarley.

"So it is. I wish he was out of the school or had never come to it."

"There is that affair of the ring."

"So there is. Mrs. Simcox is very much put out about it. We cannot find it anywhere, and the presumption is that Lighthouse took it—stole it, in fact."

"Certainly, sir."

"Armond is our right-hand man. He brings us information respecting all that goes on in the school. I am indebted to his father, and I cannot make an example of him. Can I?"

"I do not see how you can, sir."

"If he cut the rope," continued Mr. Simcox, "he was very much to blame in giving way to

his temper, but he tells me that Lighthouse had aggravated him until he was almost mad."

"What does the gymnasium attendant ask for?" said Mr. Snarley.

"Money or punishment. He says that unless Armond gives him fifty pounds, he will summon him in the Brighton police-court, and expose the whole affair."

"Did he say that?"

"Undoubtedly. The fellow was very bold and brazen," answered Mr. Simcox; "I may almost call him insolent in the extreme."

"Perhaps the better way will be for Armond to write to his father and state the case, making it an accident, and say that he requires fifty pounds as compensation for this Jackson."

"A very excellent idea," answered Mr. Simcox, "and one I highly approve of."

"There is another question, sir," said Mr. Snarley.

"You allude to Lighthouse's position."

"I do. He will want his character cleared, and no doubt he will insist upon it, for I expect he is working in with Jackson."

"He is. Armond told me how the diary got into his possession, and that Lighthouse boasted he had given it to Jackson," answered Mr. Simcox.

"What is to be done? It will not do to degrade Armond in the eyes of his school-fellows," said Snarley.

"Certainly not. He is a great favorite of mine, and I am willing to believe that he acted under great provocation. We must ignore Lighthouse, and pay the man Jackson."

"A very wise decision, sir. Shall I send Armond to you?"

"Not now," replied Mr. Simcox. "I think we have hit upon a way out of the difficulty, though I must confess that if I did not owe Armond's father money, I should see justice done."

A footstep was heard on the threshold, and a voice said:

"Justice. Certainly, always do justice."

It was Mr. Markwell who had come in from a walk.

He inquired what the subject under discussion was, and Mr. Simcox informed him.

"It seems to me," he replied, "that this boy, Armond, has behaved very badly, and that a great injustice has been done to Lighthouse."

"Yes, yes," answered Mr. Simcox, testily; "but there are peculiar relations between Armond's father and me, so that we must hush the matter up by payment of the man Jackson's demands."

"Have I heard aright?" cried Mr. Markwell, indignantly.

"I have striven to convey my meaning as well as I am able."

"Then all I can say is, that I will not continue to conduct this school with you another day!" answered Mr. Markwell.

The professor stared at him in blank amazement.

"Would you sever the friendly nature of our intercourse for such a trifle?" he asked.

"A trifle!" repeated Mr. Markwell. "Do you call it a trifle to allow a stain to rest undeservedly upon a boy's character? I hope I am a gentleman and a Christian, and I will be no party to it."

"Sir!" replied Mr. Simcox. "This language—"

"This language," interrupted Mr. Markwell, "is justified by the course you have adopted. It may suit your tool, Mr. Snarley, to fall in with your views; I neither can nor will."

"Well, well, do not be in such a hurry to condemn us," said the professor, adding, as he saw Mr. Snarley was about to speak. "Snarley, be silent. I order you not to speak. This is no quarrel of yours. We will hear what Mr. Markwell, my esteemed friend, Markwell, has to say."

"What I have to say will not take long," exclaimed Markwell. "You must do justice to this boy, and consequently you must punish Armond."

"In what way?" asked the professor.

"Way," answered Mr. Markwell. "The magnitude of the punishment ought to be proportioned to the offense. I will leave that to you. Give me your assurance that you will do justice, and I shall be satisfied. If not, we separate; for I will never be a party to carry on a school on false principles."

"Very well. I give you my assurance to that effect. Armond is too big to be caned or flogged, and I will make him apologize to Lighthouse in private."

"Before the whole school," insisted Mr. Markwell.

"There may be a difficulty about that."

"If so, let two boys—say Brabazon and Fowler—be selected to hear his apology. What do you say to that?"

"That may be managed," answered Mr. Simcox, after a moment's hesitation.

"Is it finally settled?" demanded Mr. Markwell.

"It is. Forgive, I beg of you, what I can only call an error of—ahem—of judgment."

"Certainly. There is my hand; not another word shall pass my lips respecting it," said Mr. Markwell, good-naturedly.

Mr. Snarley was instructed to seek Armond, and inform him that it was clearly proved against him that he had cut the rope at the gymnasium, and put the fault upon another boy.

He did not like to hear that it was decided that he should apologize to Dick, but he felt he would rather do that than his father should hear of his bad behavior.

That he could get fifty pounds for Jackson, if the affair was represented in the light of an accident, he did not doubt.

Indeed, he did get it in a few days.

Humbling himself before Dick was the worst part of the matter.

It was arranged that his penance should take place in Mr. Simcox's study.

Fowler and Brabazon were summoned to attend at the same time, though they did not know for what they were wanted.

Mr. Snarley ushered them into the room, and went away, returning with Armond and Lighthouse.

Mr. Simcox and Markwell sat side by side at a table.

Armond was paler than usual, for he knew what was coming.

Mr. Markwell spoke:

"Armond," he exclaimed, "you have been guilty of a grave offense, and you are here to make reparation; do so."

In a low voice, so low as to be scarcely audible, Armond said:

"I admit that I cut the rope, hoping to hurt Lighthouse, but not seriously, when we met in the gymnasium. I had cut the rope early in the evening, knowing it would not be touched till we had used it, and I am sorry for it."

Brabazon and Fowler regarded one another with the utmost astonishment.

Dick had rather expected what was coming, and he was not so much surprised.

"That is right," said Mr. Markwell, "you have expressed your sorrow. Now shake hands and be friends. It is lucky no greater harm came of it."

Dick extended his hand, and said in a frank, hearty voice:

"I do not bear any malice, Armond."

Armond looked at him in a way which seemed to say, "But I do."

"However he took the proffered hand."

His grasp was cold and clammy, and to shake his hand was like clasping the fin of a fish, wet and flabby.

The ceremony being over, the boys retired and Dick was heartily congratulated by Fowler and Brabazon.

When they reached the school-room, Fowler said:

"Is this all that is to be done to him?"

"I believe so," replied Dick.

"It is a great shame," remarked Brabazon.

"If Mr. Simcox doesn't punish him for doing

such a dastardly thing, I think we ought to take the law into our own hands."

"So do I," added Fowler; "but how was it found out, and brought home to him?"

Dick told him.

"I shall inform all the fellows," said Brabazon, "and then we will see if Mr. Cocky Armond"—

"B. B.," put in Dick.

"Yes; I forgot that. We shall see if he will escape us so easily."

"I say!" cried Fowler.

"What?" asked Brabazon.

"Make him run the gauntlet. We haven't had a run since Esling was expelled."

"Bravo!" cried Brabazon, "that's a rattling good idea."

CHAPTER XIX.

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET.

Dick himself would have been satisfied with Armond's apology; but as he was always ready for any mischief, he readily fell in with Fowler's proposal that Armond should be made to run the gauntlet.

Brabazon told several boys how Armond had been found out.

The news was also propagated by Messiter, who was delighted to think that Dick's character was gradually being cleared from the charges brought against him.

Everyone in the school was indignant with Armond.

Those who had been his most intimate friends fell away from and turned against him.

It was the general opinion that he ought to have been publicly birched, as Dick had been after his running away with the balloon.

Some declared he deserved to be expelled.

Armond had only one friend left, and that was the sneak, Smith.

He saw that his old companions and associates turned coldly on him.

Assuming an indifference he did not really feel, he thought they would make it up in a few days, and forget all about it.

Smith had heard the boys talking, and he came to Armond in the play ground to tell him the news.

"Well, what do the fellows say?" he asked eagerly.

With all his pretended carelessness, he was very anxious to know what was said about him.

"Everyone thinks you behaved badly, and that you are not a gentleman," replied Smith.

"Is that all?"

"No. You're to be made to run the gauntlet!"

"Run the gauntlet?" repeated Armond, with a puzzled air. "What sort of amusement may that be?"

"It's not an amusement. It's a punishment."

"I never heard of it. What is it?"

"You won't find it pleasant," replied Smith.

"The fellows say, that as Simcox shows such favoritism to you, they must take the law into their own hands."

"But what is it, you young ass?" asked Armond, in an irritable tone.

"I'll tell you as well as I can. Fowler was explaining it to Lighthouse and some other fellows, and I stood by and listened."

"Go on."

"The boys divide themselves into two rows, stretching along the play ground, and form a sort of lane."

"Yes," said Armond, much interested.

"Brabazon is to take you by the scurf of the neck, and kick you into the lane, down which you are to run as hard as you can."

"I don't see much in that."

"Ah! but the worst is to come. That's only the beginning of it," answered Smith.

"What else is there?"

"Each fellow, on either side, holds something in his hand, a bat, a stump, or hockey-stick, or an old boot, and as you go along, you get hit by everyone, and punched and kicked and hissed at."

"Oh! that's running the gauntlet, is it?" said Armond, between his clenched teeth.

"Yes; and Brabazon says he hopes you will like it."

"I won't do it. They can't make me run."

"You'll have to," replied Smith. "If you don't, they say they will lead you such a life that you won't be able to stay in the school. When you have run the gauntlet, they will not chaff you any more about cutting the rope, and everything will go on as usual."

"It's a nice lookout. When am I to do it?" asked Armond.

"This afternoon, after four o'clock school."

Armond leant against the wall, looking the picture of misery.

The luck was turning against him now, and he did not know how to avoid the rather cruel but just resolve of his school-fellows.

That he had deserved it all he could not deny for a moment.

He would reach the end of the row of angry and yelling boys black and blue, sore all over, aching from his head to his feet.

The prospect was not a cheering one.

To tell Mr. Simcox would be of no use, because if the boys had made up their mind to prosecute him, they would do it some time or other, even if they had to wait.

Gaining Mr. Simcox's protection would only be putting off the evil day.

In the playground the boys were seldom watched by an usher.

It was when they walked out, roamed on the beach, and played cricket or hockey in the field that a master accompanied them.

Consequently when the boys came out of school, the coast was clear.

Fowler went up to Armond.

Touching him on the shoulder he said:

"All the fellows in the school are dissatisfied with you, and they have asked me to be their spokesman."

"What have they got to grumble at?" asked Armond, attempting a smile.

"A great deal, I think. You have behaved much worse than ever Lighthouse did, and you are let off with an apology."

"I have nothing to do with Lighthouse," Armond said, some of his old hatred peeping out in his face.

"As I have introduced his name," continued Fowler, "I will say he is a trump, compared with you."

"Why don't you go and kiss him, if you're so fond of him?" Armond said, with a sneer.

"Don't be cheeky," Fowler exclaimed. "I was only going to observe that Lighthouse has never, since he's been at this school, behaved in an ungentlemanly manner."

"Ungentlemanly!" repeated Armond.

"Yes; perhaps you don't understand the term?" replied Fowler, with cutting sarcasm.

"Yes, I do. Why shouldn't I, as well as you?"

A few boys had collected round them, seeing there was an animated discussion going on, and Messiter, quite by accident, of course, happened to exclaim:

"Tripe and onions."

"What's that you say?" cried Armond, turning round fiercely.

"We're going to present Lighthouse with a testimonial, and when the thingy-my-jig is given to him, we shall have a tripe supper, that's all. Tripe and onions, Cocky; you know what tripe is, don't you?"

"I'm talking to Fowler, not to you," said Armond, as he heard a titter go round the circle that had formed close to them.

"Talk away, we don't want to listen," answered Messiter.

At this there was a laugh.

The boys remembered how Armond used to listen at night, and report them, if they did anything against the rules.

"Who said you did?" exclaimed Armond, who began to feel very uncomfortable.

Armond had been a great man, owing to the favoritism of the masters and Lighthouse's disgrace.

None, except Smith, had really liked him. All the boys were glad of having what Messiter called "the chance of a pitch in" at him. The crowd around Armond and Fowler grew denser.

"I'm telling him," said Fowler, "that we think he has treated Lightheart very badly, and if the governor won't do what he ought, we shall have to do it for him in our own peculiar way."

"I should think," said Armond, trying to make a stand, "that Mr. Simcox was a better judge of how he ought to conduct his school than any of you."

"I don't know that," said Fowler.

"The governor's had too much tripe," said Messiter.

"Hold your row," cried Fowler, pulling his ear till he howled. "Get out."

He gave him a push, and he fell against Brabazon, who gave him another shove, saying:

"No child of mine."

The next fellow he fell against pushed him out of the circle, and Fowler said:

"Now we have got rid of that interruption, we will go on with business. I'm not a good hand at talking, and I'll come to the point."

"Thank you," replied Armond, with another of his quiet sneers.

"You've got to run the gauntlet," continued Fowler. "That is the decision of the whole school."

"How do you like that news, Cocky?" cried Messiter from the middle of the play ground.

He had got on the wooden horse which stood there for fellows to practice jumping on.

This gave him an elevated position, from which he could hear and see well.

"I knew this in the morning," said Armond.

"How?" asked Fowler.

"Never mind how; I knew it."

"Smiff. Smiff again!" cried the irrepressible Messiter.

"Just go and hit that Messiter on the head with a brick, some of you fellows," exclaimed Brabazon. "He won't be quiet."

"Yes, I will, Brabazon," cried Messiter, in alarm. "Don't shy bricks. I'll close."

There was a brief silence.

"I might have gone to Mr. Simcox and claimed his protection," cried Armond; "but I did not. I merely tell you this to show you that I wish to stand well with you; and I think that as the masters are satisfied with my apology to Lightheart, for what, after all, was only an error of judgment, and done hastily, you might let me off."

A chorus of "No, no, no!" arose on all sides.

"We can't do that," replied Fowler.

"Why not?"

"You must be made an example of, if you are to continue in this school. We mean to knock some of your dirty behavior out of you, and so you will have to run the gauntlet."

"I don't deserve it, really, Fowler," cried Armond.

His terror increased as the punishment seemed growing nearer.

"Of course he don't. He's as innocent as a baby," replied Messiter. "Call him St. Armond the martyr."

Dick laid hold of Messiter's leg.

"What's the row now?" asked the latter.

"Don't you crow over him. He's in good hands with Fowler and Brabazon," said Dick.

Fowler turned his attention again to the victim, after the temporary laugh Messiter's sally elicited had subsided.

"You know now what you've got to expect," he said.

"Oh, do please let me off," said Armond, who was deadly pale.

"It's impossible. Get ready."

"I have never done you any harm."

"Who said you had?" replied Fowler.

"You've behaved like a cad, and we're going to teach you better, that's all. Get ready. You can take your coat off if you like."

"It would hurt more, wouldn't it?"

"I don't know. Never having tried it, can't say."

"Are you really in earnest, Fowler?" asked Armond. "Won't anything I say induce you to think better of it?"

"No," replied Fowler sternly. "We owe a duty to ourselves, and if Mr. Simcox will not do justice, we must. Get ready."

Armond, who was a coward at heart, fell on his knees before the boys.

Fowler and Brabazon regarded him with contempt.

He put his hands together in an attitude of supplication.

"Oh, do take pity on me," he cried, in abject terror.

"What pity had you on Lightheart, when you cut the rope and tried to maim or kill him?" said Fowler.

Armond groaned.

"What pity," said Brabazon, "have you had on Lightheart, while he has been under suspicion of having done a dirty trick?"

The wretched boy could make no answer.

Again Fowler's voice was heard saying, "Get ready."

Armond remained on his knees, and tears were in his eyes.

His tormentors were as hard as iron and as deaf as fate.

CHAPTER XX.

A BOY'S PUNISHMENT.

BRABAZON and Fowler stood over Armond like two jailers, watching him narrowly lest he should escape.

The boys, under Messiter's directions, armed themselves with whatever was handiest.

Some grasped a stump, a single stick, or a bat, while others held a boot, a hockey-stick, a gutta-percha whip, and a bough torn down from the sycamore-tree in the playground.

They formed themselves into two rows, extending all the length of the playground.

Only one boy in the school was absent, that was Armond's young brother.

He had tried to sneak away, but Messiter saw him and brought him back.

Messiter shut him up in the lavatory and locked the door.

Smith, although he professed a great liking for Armond, and was his inseparable companion, joined one of the rows.

The fact was, he was afraid of being treated in a similar manner if he showed any signs of friendship.

Smith was just the fellow to fall away from a friend in the hour of misfortune; a sneak can never be relied on.

Strange Albert took his place with the rest.

His pet bird, Jock, was getting much better, but he had not forgotten the cruel way in which Armond had shot at him.

The wing was nearly healed, and Jock flew about a little again.

Albert had laid hold of a brick, in the absence of any thing better.

Dick saw this, and exclaimed:

"What have you got?"

"A brick," replied Strange Albert.

"What for?"

"To shy at that big beast who shot at my bird."

"But you musn't do that—bricks are not fair," said Dick.

"Doesn't he deserve it? A fellow who ill-treats dumb animals must be a coward, because the poor creatures can't talk and take their own part."

"Get something else," said Dick, who had some generosity left to extend toward his fallen enemy.

"I can't now," replied Albert, "everything has been taken, even to an old boot."

"Shin or punch him, then, but drop that brick."

Strange Albert did so, though rather against his will.

Suddenly, Messiter, who had been arranging

the boys in two rows, saw some one trying to get out of the lavatory window.

He made a rush in that direction.

"What's up, Harry?" said Dick.

"It's Armond, junior," replied Messiter.

"What of him?"

"He wants to go and call the masters—I know his game."

Just as young Armond got on the window-sill, Messiter arrived and hit him on the shins, which caused him to get down very quickly.

"Oh, you beastly bully!" cried young Armond.

"You stop where you are!" exclaimed Messiter.

"What did you hit me on the shins with your fist for?"

"Find out."

"What's your rayson?" continued Armond, junior, whose language was not of the best.

"You oughtn't to ask," replied Messiter.

"Why?" asked Armond, junior.

"Because almonds and raysons generally go together," Messiter said with a laugh.

"You'll find me a bitter almond before I've done with you—me and my brother too, though you have got us down at present," answered the boy, savagely.

Messiter left him rubbing his shins, but he previously secured the window by a rusty nail, which he put in in such a way that it could not be moved by any one inside.

He was just in time to take his place in the middle of the right-hand row.

Fowler grasped Armond, senior, firmly by one arm.

Brabazon did the same by the other.

Then they dragged the shrinking, trembling wretch, to the top of the dark lane of eager boys through which he had to travel.

"You'd better run hard when I give you the signal," said Fowler, "because, the faster you go, the less you will be hurt."

"What's the signal?" asked Armond, faintly.

"A jolly good kick behind," continued Fowler.

"Have you got him?" said Brabazon.

"Yes, hard and fast. Why?"

"Because I want to have my innings."

"All right. Squeeze in somewhere. I'll start the beggar."

Brabazon went down the line and took a place about the middle.

All the boys were on tiptoe with expectation. Each was fully prepared to inflict as much pain as he could on the unhappy victim.

Running the gauntlet was something new to most of them, and they liked it better on that account.

Armond had no real friends.

When he had been a great swell in the school, he had abused his power to betray his companions to the masters.

This they could never forget or forgive.

"Now, then," exclaimed Fowler, raising Armond up, "off you go."

He gave him a hearty kick and pushed him forward.

Armond ran a few paces and then stopped, as if he did not mean to go any farther.

But the boys belabored him in such a manner that, howling with pain, he started off at a mad pace.

Every one hit him with something or kicked him during the short space that was occupied in his wild career.

The only boy who didn't touch him in some way, was Dick.

"I won't hurt him, poor chap," muttered Dick; "he'll get it hot enough without me."

At length, panting and exhausted, Armond reached the end of the lane.

He sank on the ground smarting and aching all over.

There was scarcely a square inch of his body that was not hurt in some way or other.

He writhed in agony on the graveled playground.

Sobs and cries of pain broke from him, and when he was able, he got up and crawled away into the school-room.

Sitting down in a very one-sided manner on

a bench, he gave himself up to melancholy reflection.

The shouts of the boys still rang in his ears. A few minutes passed, and he found that he was not alone.

Some one had followed him into the school-room.

It was Dick.

"Hullo, old man!" exclaimed Dick, "feel better, eh?"

"Your presence is not likely to do me much good," rejoined Armond, with a vindictive glance.

"I've come to say that I am sorry you had to go through the gauntlet, but the fellows would have it."

"You sorry?" exclaimed Armond. "Not you. Why, you got it up for me."

"I swear I didn't," replied Dick.

"I dare say. You hit and kicked as hard as any of them," said Armond savagely.

"Indeed I did not touch you."

"So you say."

"You might have seen me."

"How could I see you?" said Armond rubbing his back. "I shut my eyes and ran as hard as I could. But I'll have my revenge for this."

"Can I do anything for you?" asked Dick, kindly.

"No, you can't," said Armond, adding, "yes, you can. You can get out of my sight, for I'd as soon be with a snake as you."

"All right. You're like the toad under a harrow. Good-bye," said Dick.

He went away and joined the other boys in the playground.

Everybody was talking about the way in which Armond had run the gauntlet.

Each boy declared that he had hit him on the legs, the arm, or the back.

The general opinion was, that the honor of the school had been cleared.

An act of justice had been done.

Strange Albert was particularly pleased.

He had his bird upon his arm, and the magpie chattered away as if he had got quite well.

"Didn't we give it him?" said Albert to Dick.

"Rather more than he deserved, I think," answered Dick.

"Not a ha'porth," exclaimed Messiter, who came up.

"I kicked his shins, and tripped him up; and then didn't he catch it over the head and shoulders?" said Albert.

"I gave him one on the arm with a stump," remarked Messiter, "which he won't forget in a hurry."

"How's Jock?" asked Dick.

"Oh! getting all right, thank you," replied Strange Albert; "he can fly now."

"Dick," said Messiter, "I owe you a shilling. The *mater* sent me some money this morning, and I'll pay you."

"All right—part," said Dick.

Messiter placed a shilling in his hand.

The magpie saw the glittering silver and made a peck at it.

Seizing it in his beak, he flew away, and landed on the roof of the house.

"Well, I'll be flummoxed!" cried Dick, "that's a rum go."

"He often takes things that shine," said Strange Albert.

"Does he? I wish he would make an exception in my case. I'm a shilling to the bad."

"Oh! I'll pay you the shilling. I don't want you to be out of pocket through any fault of my bird's," answered Albert.

"No you shan't. I'll go after him. Where has he gone?"

"Up to his nest on the roof. He's got a sort of cave somewhere near that stack of chimneys," said Albert.

"How can I get up?" queried Dick.

"You can't get up," observed Messiter; "but I'll tell you who will go for you."

"Who?"

"Sam Fuggles. He can go all over the house, and no one will say anything to him. We should be stopped at once."

"Where is Sam?" said Dick.

"His knife and boot cleaning is over by this time. I should think he would be at leisure. Oh! I know where to spot him."

"Where?"

"He spoons a little slavey at Miss Bodmin's," said Messiter.

"So he does; a little fair-haired woman, isn't she?" said Dick.

"Yes."

"I've seen him there, talking to her at Miss Bodmin's back door. He's very sweet on her."

"Awful spoons. It's a case of hard hit," said Messiter, with a laugh.

"Do you think Sam would go up and get on the roof?"

"Of course he would."

"There's a trap-door at the top of our staircase, and some steps somewhere," observed Dick.

"Look over the wall. I'll bet a new hat you'll find Sam in the road spooning."

"I will," said Dick. "I don't want to lose my shilling. A Robertus, *alias* Bob, is worth having, since I have returned all the money collected for Oko Jumbo."

Messiter laughed.

"Never mind," he said. "We had our spree."

"Yes," replied Dick, "and I mean to have another before long. But I must get back that bob."

He climbed up the wall and looked over into the street.

At Miss Bobmin's door he saw Sam talking to a pretty, fair-haired servant, in a clean muslin dress.

"Sam, you base deceiver," he said, "come out of that."

Sam Fuggles turned round, slightly alarmed.

"Oh! it's you, Master Lightheart," he said.

"What new rig have you got on?"

"Let the girl alone," said Dick.

"I ain't a-touching of her," said Sam.

"If she knew what a villain you are, she would not look at you in a blue moon."

"Is he a villain?" asked the girl, laughing.

"Awful, my dear," replied Dick. "He's had ever so many breaches of promise brought against him, and he keeps quite a collection of broken hearts in a tin-box."

"Well, I'm blowed," said Sam, "you can do it, Master Lightheart."

"Don't you believe a word he says, Polly," continued Dick.

"My name isn't Polly," said the girl, with a toss of the head.

"Then it's Sarah Ann."

"No, it isn't; it's Selina."

"A very pretty name, too, and much too good for a villain like Sam. Take my advice, and don't you become Mrs. Fuggles."

"What's your game, a-spoiling of me?" asked Sam, angrily.

"I want you at once. Come here, or I'll shy a brick at your head," replied Dick.

"Can't you see as I'm engaged?"

"Never mind; what do you suppose we keep you for at Simcox's, if you are not to wait on the young gentlemen?"

"Blow me tight. You're a-going it, Master Lightheart," exclaimed Sam.

"Go in, Polly. Beg pardon, I mean Selina," said Dick. "If you don't, I'll tell Miss Bodmin, and you'll get the bullet."

"Oh! the vicious young limb!" cried Selina.

"He's all that," remarked Sam, with a wise shake of the head.

Selina went inside quickly, and shut the door after her.

Sam went round and entered the playground, where he found Dick.

"Now then, Master Lightheart," he said, "what's on?"

"Business, Sam," replied Dick.

"What did you want to go on like that for, before Selina?"

"Chaff, Sam; only chaff."

"Chaff be hanged," said Sam, much agrieved. "Very likely she will throw me up. You don't know what gals are as well as I do."

"Perhaps not. She's a nice girl, though."

"And as good as she looks," said Sam.

"Never mind her. Will you do something for me?" asked Dick.

"Of course I will, sir," answered Sam.

"Anything I want?"

"Yes. I'm on for anything; from pitch and toss to manslaughter. You're a good sort, Master Lightheart, though you needn't have tried to crab me with my gal."

"Go on, you stupid. She'll be all right."

"Well, what is this here performance?" demanded Sam.

"I'll tell you," replied Dick.

He drew him a little on one side, and pointed to the roof of the house.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAGPIE'S NEST.

"Now, sir," said Sam, "what's the caper?"

"I want you to go up to the top of the house," replied Dick.

"None of your gammon, Master Lightheart," said Sam, regarding him dubiously.

"I thought I had told you, Sam Fuggles, that you were to address me as Mister, and not Master Lightheart," said Dick, severely.

"Beg pardon, sir, thought you was a boy," answered Sam, with an affectation of humility.

"We are young men; is not this an academy for young gentlemen, Sam?"

"Yes, sir, it says so in the prospectuses."

"Of course it does."

"But what's this about going on the roof? I know what you are, Mast—I mean Mister Lightheart."

"I'll tell you. Strange Albert's bird has just taken a shilling out of my hand and flown up to the roof with it in his beak."

"He ought to have six months, sir," said Sam, with a grin.

"Shut up; don't chaff me," cried Dick.

Sam laughed loudly, as if his fancy was immensely tickled.

"Do you want a new set?" asked Dick.

"Set of what, sir?"

"Teeth."

"No, sir."

"Then dry up, or I shall have to knock all you have got, down your ugly throat. Are you going on the roof for me?"

"What'll missus say if she catches me?" asked Sam.

"Hatch up some story or other. Say the chimney's on fire."

"That'll do. It ain't a bad dodge by any manner of means," replied Sam.

"I must have that shilling; the money market is tight, and a shilling's a shilling," continued Dick.

"Findings keepings, sir," remarked Sam, "and if I find it, I ought to have half."

"You ungrateful, cadging humbug!" cried Dick.

"Why, sir?" asked Sam, putting on a look of injured innocence.

"Didn't I tip you half-a-crown only a fortnight ago?"

"That was for fetching of your tarts all the half," replied Sam.

"Are you going?"

"Well, sir, give us twopence out of it."

"What for?" asked Dick.

"To get a drink of beer. I'm as dry as a sallymander, I am. Missus has taken to having a patent tap for the cask, and when she's drawn the beer, she takes out the thing as turns the cock on, and I'm licked."

"Serve you right, too, you beer-stealing brute," said Dick. "But I don't mind springing a couple of coppers to get you a pint of four-half, which is about your form."

"Thank you, sir. I dare say you mean it kindly, but I'd not bemean myself by drinking such costermonger's swipes. You may keep your browns, thanking you all the same," said Sam, indignantly.

"Are you going after that magpie?" asked Dick, impatiently.

He raised his foot as he spoke.

"It's some plant you've got on," replied Sam, still suspicious.

"I'll swear it ain't. The bird has copped my shilling. I'm hard up, and I want it. Get up the stairs, and crawl through the trap-door, and you're sure to find it."

"Think so?"

"I don't think, I'm sure of it: the beggar's got a cave or nest, or a something up there."

Sam still hesitated.

Dick had such a reputation for practical joking that everybody distrusted him.

Sam certainly thought he was going to be sold.

He expected that when he showed himself on the roof, a shower of stones would salute him.

Angry at his reluctance to do as he was told, Dick gave him a gentle kick behind.

"You've no call to kick a cove, Mister Lighthouse," he said, applying his hand to the injured part.

"It was only by way of reminder," said Dick, laughing.

"Reminder of what, sir?"

"Of what you've got to expect. Off with you."

Fearing another assault, Sam Fuggles declared he would go to the top of the house, and look after the magpie who had so boldly stolen the shilling which Dick held in his hand when he was talking to Strange Albert.

He had been on the roof once before, during a thunderstorm, when the gutters and pipes were choked up, and he had no difficulty in finding his way again.

Having reached the attics, he pushed open the trap-door, and got on the tiles.

Walking along a gutter, between two sloping parts of the roof, his progress was stopped by a stack of chimneys.

Looking down, on hearing a strange noise, he saw the magpie, who appeared very angry at his intrusion.

"Get out!" said Sam, clapping his hands.

Jock flew away and perching a little distance off, seemed to watch his proceedings with much interest.

"Master Lighthouse wasn't joking with me after all. This here bird has a nest or something like it," was Sam's muttered remark.

In an angle was a heap of small bits of paper, a few sticks, some stones, a tuft or two of grass, any number of buttons, bits of glass, and a variety of things which the mischievous bird had picked up and carried off at different times.

It is well known that magpies will seize anything that attracts their eye, and having stolen it, hide it.

On the top of the heap was Dick's shilling, which Sam picked up.

"Well, I never," he said, "this is a rummy go. If that bird was properly trained, and made use of, he'd be a fortune to his owner."

He was about to go away, when he thought he might as well turn the hiding-place over, in case there were any more pieces of money to be found.

Giving the heap a kick with his foot, he saw something sparkle in the sunlight. Stooping down, he pounced upon a diamond ring.

The stone, which was one of price, shot out innumerable rays in all directions when exposed to the light.

"I'll take this to the missus," said Sam. "It's worth a dollar to find a thing like this, and it would be no good for me to keep it; besides, it's being dishonest."

There was nothing else of any consequence in the magpie's nest, and he went down the trap again.

On the staircase he met Mrs. Simcox who, as the servants said, "was always poking about somewhere."

"What hare you a-doing of hup here?" she asked.

"Please, mum," said Sam, removing his cap, "one of the young gentlemen's got a magpie."

"Hi ham haware hof hit," said Mrs. Simcox.

"This 'ere magpie, mum, goes and bones a shilling out of one of the young gentlemen's hands, and I was asked to go and get it, as the bird was seen to fly to the top of the house."

"Did you find it?"

"Yes, mum. It's in my hand now, and I was coming to say that I had found something else."

"What helse?" asked Mrs. Simcox, who was becoming interested.

He showed her the ring.

"Hoh, my!" she cried, "give it 'ere. It's my ring."

Her eyes beamed with pleasure as she snatched the diamond ring from him, and eagerly examined it.

There was no doubt it was the ring she had accused Dick Lighthouse of stealing.

"It was in the magpie's nest, mum," said Sam, "and I"—

She did not wait to hear any more, but ran down stairs to her husband, to whom she told what had happened.

"This is a very extraordinary thing," observed the professor, "but I have heard of the thievish instincts of magpies."

"He stole the shilling, and no doubt he got in at my window and stole my ring," said Mrs. Simcox.

"I am glad it is found, and pleased to think that Lighthouse is not guilty."

The professor touched the bell, and when the servant came, said:

"Send Master Lighthouse here."

In a few minutes Dick entered the room, wondering what new scrape he had got into.

"I have good news for you," said Mr. Simcox.

"What about, sir?"

"Mrs. Simcox has found her lost ring."

Dick's face lighted up with genuine pleasure.

"That is indeed good news, sir," he said.

"Will you tell me all about it, if you please?"

"Certainly. It will give me much pleasure to do so. There is a magpie's nest on the roof of this house, and my servant Sam discovered the ring in it only a short time ago."

"That's jolly," said Dick.

"Lighthouse," observed Mrs. Simcox, "hi'm very sorry for haccusing you. Will you come to tea with me this afternoon?"

"Thank you, ma'am; I shall be delighted," said Dick, before whose eyes floated visions of various jams and cakes.

"Run away," said the professor, "and tell your companions this remarkable fact about the ring and the bird."

Away went Dick, and he was soon surrounded by an eager and admiring group.

There was only one boy in the school who was not pleased at Dick's innocence being thus publicly established.

That was Armond.

As Dick was getting on, Armond was going down.

The boys looked upon Armond with ill-concealed aversion.

Dick they delighted to honor.

Brabazon and Fowler caught hold of him by the arms, while Messiter seized his legs.

Taking him off his feet, they carried him round the playground in triumph; and all the others ran after, cheering wildly.

The hurrahs of the boys made pleasant music in Dick's ears.

He felt proud of his present position, and determined to work hard until the Christmas holidays, and see if he could obtain some prizes.

The remainder of the half glided very quickly away, and the examination took place.

To his delight Dick found himself first in mathematics and third in classics.

He gained two handsome prizes, and was complimented by every one on his success.

The holidays were very agreeable, for Henrietta Stoner came to stay at the rectory.

But holidays cannot last forever, and the boys went back to school again.

At Mr. Simcox's there were only holidays twice a year—at Christmas and Midsummer.

About this time the proprietors of several schools in Brighton began to take great interest in the volunteer movement.

A corps was formed, which was called the

"Brighton Boys' Corps, or the 101st Royal Sussex Volunteers."

Several of Mr. Simcox's boys joined it.

Among the number were Dick, Messiter and Armond.

Mr. Snarley was admitted as an honorary member.

The three we have mentioned shot so well after some practice that it was resolved to send them up to the annual contest at Wimbledon.

They were to fire for the Queen's Prize and for other smaller contests.

There was great excitement in the school as July approached.

Dick was continually reminded that he had to uphold the honor of the Brighton Boys' Volunteers.

He inwardly determined that he would do his best.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BRIGHTON BOYS IN CAMP.

"SNARLEY'S going up with us to Wimbledon," said Messiter, one evening, as the boys were talking together in the school-room, just before supper.

"Is he?" replied Dick. "He'll be sorry for it."

"Why?"

"Because we'll have a game with him. I have been very quiet lately, and the governor sent me a sovereign this morning. Simcox had said in his report that I was a good boy."

"Hasn't it been an effort to you?" asked Messiter.

"Rather; but I had to retrieve my character. I went ahead a little too fast."

"It will be awfully jolly up at Wimbledon," continued Messiter, returning to the subject of the camp.

"So I should think. How are they going to put us up? Shall we be in lodgings?"

Messiter laughed.

"Don't you know," he said, "that all the fellows who are up in the camp, go under canvas?"

"No, I didn't know it. I haven't been coaching up the subject as you evidently have. I like the idea, though, of a tent."

"You and I, Armond and Snarley," said Messiter, "will have a tent all to ourselves."

"I wish Armond wasn't going. I can't cotton to that fellow," replied Dick.

"He has let you alone lately."

"Well, yes, I will say that for him, though I think a fear of having to run the gauntlet again has kept him still more than anything else."

"Perhaps it has. He got it hot that time."

"I'm positive he hates me as much as ever, and is only watching his opportunity," said Dick.

"Our fellows ought to be proud of us," said Messiter. "We are the only ones selected to represent the corps at Wimbledon, what a lark it would be if we won the Queen's Prize."

"Not much chance of that," said Dick.

"Well, we might get the badge of the association and some money."

"So we might. I've worked hard at the targets and can make a few bull's-eyes."

"What a score you made last week," remarked Messiter; eighteen out of a possible twenty, and a strong wind blowing at the time."

"Armond made seventeen under the same circumstances a week before, and I suppose that is why they put him in our team," said Dick.

"Of course. We three are the crack shots of the corps."

"Anyhow," Dick went on. "If we don't get anything, it will be a jolly spree, quite a holiday, in fact, and we shall have the fun of badgering Snarley."

Mr. Snarley happened to be passing by in his slippers, and overheard this remark.

"Lighthouse," he said, in solemn tones.

"Sir," replied Dick, turning red.

"Scarcely a moment ago, I heard you take my name in vain. This is wrong."

"Please, sir, I didn't mean"—

"Don't prevaricate," interrupted Mr. Snarley, "I heard you say you would have the fun of badgering Snarley—that's me. Now I warn you that if you attempt to play any tricks upon me, I shall report you to headquarters, and have you dealt with according to martial law."

"Who is he, sir?" asked Dick.

"Martial law is—is, in fact, martial law," replied Mr. Snarley, who was under some difficulty to explain the phrase.

"I am still in the dark, sir."

"You will find out in time, when you are under arrest, with sentries guarding you. However, be careful."

"It was only chaff, sir," replied Dick, in a tone of apology.

"Mind it becomes nothing else. I had hoped that we were going up to the camp in a feeling of good-fellowship."

"I thought we were going in the train?" replied Dick.

"Don't make stupid jokes; they are ill-timed and uncalled for," said Mr. Snarley, severely.

"Beg pardon, sir."

"So you ought. I shall be your superior officer, and you must obey my orders or take the consequences. Bear that well in mind. In fact, if I were to speak to Mr. Simcox now, I could stop your going at all."

"Don't do that, sir," said Dick in a fright.

"I'll behave like a lamb, I will, indeed."

"I hope so," replied Mr. Snarley.

Messiter turned to Dick and said:

"That was a squeak."

"A narrow shave; I thought he meant to put the crab on," answered Dick. "What a bother it is for the masters to go sneaking about in their slippers; you never know who is near you and who is not."

"They are getting stricter," said Messiter, "because Armond is afraid to sneak as much as he used to."

In a few days after this conversation the boys in uniform, which was a light gray picked out with red, started, rifles in hand, for Wimbledon.

They travelled quickly to Clapham Junction, on the Brighton and South Coast line, and then they had to change, to get to the Southwestern.

"Lightheart," said Mr. Snarley, just inquired of—of the porters where we are to go to for Wimbledon."

He was confused by the appearance of the long, dark, tunnel-like passage at the junction, and the numerous staircases all along it.

Dick met a porter and accosted him.

"Wimbledon, sir," replied the porter. "Southwestern main line down, No. 6 up the steps."

"I'll fog Snarley," thought Dick.

He returned to his party, each of whom carried his rifle and carpet-bag.

"Well," ejaculated Snarley.

"It's No. 1, sir," replied Dick; "right at the end, I think."

"Bless me! what a labyrinth this is. Come along, Armond. You and Messiter can follow us."

"Yes, sir," replied Dick.

"No. 1, I think you said?" continued Snarley.

"Yes, sir. Make haste; the porter told me there was a train just going, and as we are volunteers, we don't want another ticket. Government pays for us on the Southwestern line."

"Ah, indeed, that is as it should be; sixpence saved is sixpence gained. Come on, Armond, or we shall lose the train, and I am anxious to get early to the camp," replied Mr. Snarley, pleasantly.

They started at a trot, and Messiter was about to follow at the same pace.

"Don't hurry, Harry," said Dick.

"Why not?" inquired Messiter.

"Because I've got a lark on."

They soon reached No. 6 steps, and Dick led Messiter up.

"This is six; I thought you said one was the number," said Messiter.

"So I did."

"What for?"

"To get rid of Snarley and Armond."

Messiter grinned.

"You're making a beginning early," he observed.

"I told him I would badger him, and I always keep my word."

Just as they reached the platform a train came in, and the porter cried out:

"Wimbledon, Malden, Surbiton, and Hampton Court train."

"Jump in, Harry," said Dick.

In about a minute they had taken their places in a first-class carriage, and were rolling along to Wimbledon Station.

They traveled very comfortably to Wimbledon, and when they reached the station, the question was would they ride or walk to the camp.

"Here y'ar, sir. Here y'ar," cried the fly-drivers. "Ride to the camp, sir? Gentlemen, sir. Here y'ar."

"How much is it?" asked Dick.

"Take you for a shilling a head, sir."

"What do you say, Harry?" asked Dick again to his companion; "only a bob a nut. Are you on?"

"Here's a cove with a buss taking fellows for sixpence," replied Messiter.

"Never mind that; let's do the cheese and have a fly. Step in. What's the odds so long as you're happy?—as they say in the song."

They jumped in and were soon driven to the camp.

This was pitched on the common, and entirely surrounded with a high wooden paling to keep out intruders.

Being in uniform, they passed in without paying.

It was about four in the afternoon of Saturday, and volunteers were arriving rapidly from all parts.

No firing had as yet taken place, because the business of the meeting did not commence until the following Monday.

The camp presented a fairy-like scene with its hundreds of tents stretching away in all directions.

Volunteers in all sorts of uniform stalked about, inspecting everything at their leisure.

"Stand a drink, Harry," said Dick, espying the large refreshment pavilion on the left.

"All right," replied Messiter. "What's it going to be—lemonade or ginger-beer?"

"Pop for me, well iced."

"Same here. I'll do ditto," answered Messiter.

They went up to the counter and had some very refreshing ginger-beer.

"I feel better," exclaimed Dick. "That suited my complaint exactly. Now let's go and look for our tent."

A soldier came by who was one of the detachment of the Guards sent down on fatigue duty.

"Mister Lobster," cried Dick, with his usual impudence,

"Well?" replied the soldier, with a half smile.

"Why don't you salute, sir, when you are speaking to an officer?" continued Dick.

"Are you an officer?" asked the soldier.

"Of course I am; full ensign, holding her majesty's commission."

"It's against orders for the line to salute the volunteers; but if it would do you any good, I don't mind," said the guardsman.

"I'll let you off this time, though I believe I could get you the sack for your cheek," replied Dick, adding. "Now, attention!"

Mr. Slocum could not have uttered the words in class with more dignity.

"Where's my tent?" continued Dick.

"How should I know?" answered the soldier. "Go to headquarters and find it."

"Thank you for nothing," said Dick; "you're a very civil and obliging sort of lobster, and when I get home, I'll think of you."

"Your mother ought to have known better than to dress up a monkey in uniform," said the guardsman.

"As I said before, you're very obliging, and a credit to the service," retorted Dick. "They would not like to part with you, I should think. Where did you say they picked you up and gave you the shilling when you were drunk and starving?"

The soldier began to lose his temper.

"Young jackanapes, drop it," he cried.

"Whitechapel, did you say? You must speak louder; I'm rather deaf."

"If I had you outside, I'd Whitechapel you," exclaimed the soldier.

"But you haven't got me, old son, and you are a fool to yourself, for you might have got a bob, if you'd been civil and showed me where to obtain information about my tent."

"It's a pity such things as you are allowed to have a rifle and put on that dress," replied the soldier.

"Oh, is it? Now, look here, I see one of your officers over there, and if you don't apologize, I will report you."

The man sullenly walked away.

Dick ran quickly to the gentleman, who, from his uniform, he guessed to be an officer of the Guards.

"I want to complain of that man, if you please," he said, half out of breath.

"Which one, my little fellow?" asked the officer.

"The one over there."

The officer called to the man, who reluctantly approached, and after saluting, stood still.

"What has he done?" inquired the officer.

"He's been extremely insolent to me. I belong to the Brighton Volunteers, and have just come to take up my residence in camp. I asked him to tell me where my friend and I could obtain information about our tent, and he put himself out of the way to be rude to me."

"Your name, if you please?" continued the officer.

"Dick Lightheart, 101st Sussex Volunteers."

The officer beckoned to a sergeant who was standing outside the orderly officer's tent, and when he came up, he said:

"You will take a file of men and place this man under arrest."

The sergeant saluted.

"Ask for Captain Campbell at the Coldstream Guards' quarters on Monday morning, young gentleman, and your complaint shall be gone into," continued the officer.

Dick thanked the officer and went away with Messiter.

The soldier attempted to say something in his defense, but Captain Campbell would not hear him.

"You did that well," said Messiter.

"The cheeky fellow. He got my temper up when he called me a monkey in uniform," replied Dick.

"Shall you appear against him on Monday?"

"No, he'll be under arrest all Sunday, and that will be enough for him."

They had not gone far before a corporal came after them.

"Beg your pardon, sir," he said, respectfully, "but Captain Campbell has sent me after you to show you where to go about your tent."

"Much obliged, I'm sure," answered Dick.

The corporal conducted the boys to a large tent, where the authorities informed him that the Sussex Volunteers were encamped in a particular part of the South Camp.

Thither they went, and were assigned a tent, in which they soon made themselves at home.

"Wonder where Snarley is?" exclaimed Messiter.

"Come to grief, I hope," answered Dick, grinning.

But Mr. Snarley's adventures with Armond deserve a chapter to themselves.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. SNARLEY COMES TO GRIEF.

FULLY believing what Lightheart had told them, Mr. Snarley and Armond ran up No. 1 steps.

It happened that a Kensington train was just starting.

They got into the carriage, the guard slammed the door, blew his whistle and the train moved.

"Where are those boys?" inquired Mr. Snarley, anxiously.

"Perhaps got into another carriage," suggested Armond.

"It is likely; but I should like to make sure."

Mr. Snarley put his head out of the window, and cried:

"Hi! guard, hi!"

"Train's started, sir," replied the guard.

"Let me out. I miss some young friends of mine."

"Too late, sir."

The train rolled rapidly out of the station, and Snarley sank back into his seat.

"I suppose Lightheart and Messiter are in another carriage," he said. "Let us hope so."

He drew a small pocket flask from his coat and drank.

"Very good pale brandy. Have a drop?" he said.

"Thank you," replied Armond.

When the flask was handed back, Mr. Snarley drank again.

"Traveling is so fatiguing. Must keep one's spirits up," he remarked.

"Have we many stations to call at before we reach Wimbledon?" asked Armond.

"I don't know. Keep a good lookout. The neighborhood is new to me."

Armond did so, and the first station they called at was Battersea.

"Sea, 'sea," cried the porter.

"What do they say?" asked Snarley.

"Blest if I know. Can't make out," replied Armond.

Presently they stopped at Chelsea.

"Sea, 'sea," cried the porter once more.

"Sea again," said Snarley. "It's all sea. We've just come from Brighton, which is on the sea, and we can't have got back, can we?"

"It isn't likely," replied Armond.

The next stoppage was at Kensington, and here the guard told them all to get out.

"All change here," he said; "all change."

Mr. Snarley and Armond got out, and looked anxiously round for Lightheart and Messiter, who were nowhere to be seen.

"Is this Wimbledon?" said Snarley to the guard.

"Are you the Prince of Wales?" replied the guard, contemptuously.

"I don't want any impertinence from you, mind that."

"You get into a Kensington train and think you are going to Wimbledon. That's a flat's game," said the guard.

"Is it? Who's the stationmaster? I'll complain of you, you scoundrel," cried Snarley.

"You're drunk, that's my belief," the guard observed. "I saw you a-sucking at a bottle."

"Villain! conduct me to the stationmaster."

"Find him out. Now then, go along and give up your ticket."

A porter approached and held out his hand for his ticket.

"We are volunteers in uniform; at least I'm not in uniform, but my friend here is, though I'm a member of the corps, and I was told we required no tickets."

"Fiddlesticks," said the guard, "you're trying this on."

"You must pay the fare from Clapham Junction," said the porter.

"That I distinctly refuse to do," replied Snarley. "I am brought wrong and insulted by this scoundrelly fellow, who ought to have his coat torn from his back, and I will not pay a halfpenny-piece! There now!"

Mr. Snarley executed a sort of defiant dance, and snapped his fingers in the guard's face.

"Run him in," said the guard; "he's lushy."

The porter seized him by the arm, and twisting it round in a way which is called by the police "putting the screw on," dragged him up the platform.

He was speechless with rage and indignation. So was Armond.

Going up to the porter, the latter hit him one of his awkward blows under the ear.

The porter staggered, and let go his hold.

"That's right, Armond. Give it them?" cried Mr. Snarley.

"Where is that rascally guard?"

"I'm here," replied the guard, "and it will be the worse for you if you don't go quietly."

"Go. Go where?"

"To the police station. You'll have a lodging till Monday."

"Shall I, villain? Take that, and that," exclaimed Snarley, striking at him, but taking very good care not to go too near him.

The guard now foolishly lost his temper, and succeeded in striking Mr. Snarley on the face.

"Oh! my nose. It's smashed," cried the usher, wrapping it in a pocket handkerchief, which was speedily stained crimson."

The porter was preparing to tackle Armond, when the stationmaster came up with a policeman.

"What's all this about?" he inquired.

"These volunteer gents have been getting drunk and knocking the company's servants about, sir," answered the guard.

"It's an odious falsehood," exclaimed Mr. Snarley. "Look at my nose. He hasn't got a scratch."

"Lock them up for an assault," said the stationmaster.

"Do what?" said Snarley, aghast.

"It's a charge, and you must come along of me," observed the policeman.

He grasped Mr. Snarley by the collar with one hand, and Armond with the other.

They did not like to resist the police.

"This is an infamous conspiracy. We are going to Wimbledon for the shooting. This guard took us wrong, and was very insolent," said Mr. Snarley, trying to explain.

The constable dragged them away.

"Can you pay for a cab?" whispered Armond.

"Of course I can," replied Snarley.

A cab was procured.

The stationmaster and the porter followed to the station-house, but the guard could not do so, as he had to go back with his train.

When they entered the police-station, the superintendent on duty heard the charge, which was made.

The prisoners gave their names as Samuel Snarley and Christopher Armond, and their address at the Camp, Wimbledon.

They were then asked what they had to say in their defense.

Both Snarley and Armond poured out the story of their grievances.

After listening attentively, the superintendent said:

"I cannot take this charge. The defendants should have been asked for their cards. You, constable, have exceeded your duty. It is a case for a summons, if there is any charge at all."

"Of course," said Snarley, growing bold again. "I shall bring an action against the company for this infringement of the liberty of the subject."

"You can do that, sir."

"I know it. If not, why did our ancestors struggle for Magna Charta, and the bill of rights? Answer me that."

He looked round him defiantly.

The stationmaster and the porter slunk away rather crestfallen, and wishing they had not given them in charge.

Thanking the superintendent, the released prisoners left the office.

"We are well out of that," remarked Armond.

"I'll go to law with them. Never was I treated so infamously," answered Snarley.

"How shall we get to Wimbledon?" asked Armond.

"I shan't attempt it to-night. Chance has brought us to London. We will hire beds at some hotel, and go to the theater?"

"Very well, sir," replied Armond. "I'm

agreeable, and to-morrow we can reach the camp in time for church parade."

They went off arm in arm, hailed a passing hansom cab, and were driven to the West End.

"To-night we will be swells," observed Mr. Snarley, complacently, "though I hope my nose has not begun to swell."

The injured organ felt uncomfortable, and did not look very pretty.

This, however, was of trifling importance.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SLIGHT MISTAKE.

LIGHTHEART and Messiter, finding their traveling companions did not arrive, turned into their camp bedsteads at the appointed time for putting out the lights, and slept soundly till the bugle woke them at six in the morning.

"What's that?" asked Messiter, as he sat up, rubbing his eyes.

"Somebody blowing a trumpet. Perhaps he's fond of music," replied Dick, yawning.

"I wish he'd keep his beastly row to himself, or go and do it in Richmond Park."

"We're not obliged to turn out," replied Dick.

"Ain't we?"

"Certainly not; I shall roll over and go to by-bye again."

"So shall I," replied Messiter; "I always like a snooze on Sunday morning."

In an hour or two they woke up again, and began to think of breakfast.

They had brought no camp cooking utensils with them, and were dependent upon the refreshment rooms they had seen on their arrival, near the principal entrance to the camp.

Here their wants were quickly and cheaply supplied.

"I've had a tightener," said Dick, putting away his last egg.

"The blow out's cheap at the price," remarked Messiter.

"Wonder how they do it?"

"Oh, it's the number that pays. Come and take a stroll."

"Like a bird," replied Dick.

They wandered about the camp, looking at everything that came before them, and enjoying the novelty of the spectacle very much.

At about half-past ten they were standing in front of a spacious tent of an oblong shape, the flap of which was raised, revealing the handsome and most luxurious furniture within.

A carpet had been laid down upon boards; easy-chairs were placed here and there, while some wine bottles and a cigar-box stood upon a side-table.

"These are nice quarters, Dick," observed Messiter.

"I believe you, my pigeon," replied Dick, who was looking admiringly into the tent.

Outside, in front of the tent, small flower-beds had been tastefully marked out with red tiles; the beds were filled with a preparation of fibre and tan, in which flowers and shrubs in pots had been tastily arranged.

"The individual who lives here must be a swell," said Dick.

"Rather. I didn't think there was such diggins in camp," answered Messiter.

Seeing a man who looked like a servant going by, Dick exclaimed:

"Can you tell me whose tent this is?"

"Captain Slaughter's, sir; First Plymouth Invincibles," replied the man.

"I should like to go inside."

"You had better not let him catch you at it. Last year he nearly killed a city gent, he did, for walking in without permission; oh, he's awful, is the captain, when he's put out."

"Amiable ogre, I should call him," remarked Messiter.

The man passed on, and the boys thought of strolling on too.

"I wish Snarley was here," said Dick.

"I'll tell him this was our tent, and if Captain Slaughter happened to be coming up at the time, it would be a case of pickles."

"Scissors would be nothing to it," laughed Messiter.

He turned round as he spoke, and added:

"Talk of the old gentleman, and he's sure to appear."

"Who?" asked Dick.

"Why, Snarley himself."

"So it is. Hurrah! I'll be down upon him like a beaver; hold hard, don't laugh and spoil the sport."

Mr. Snarley approached by himself, looking very pale, as if from the effects of a recent dissipation.

Indeed he did not walk very straight, and had an inclination to roll a little.

"Morning, sir; how do you find yourself?" inquired Dick.

"But so so, Lightheart," answered Mr. Snarley, with a sickly smile.

"Where is Armond?"

"He has gone to headquarters to make inquiries for you, and I said I would take a turn round this portion of the camp and meet him in a quarter of an hour."

"What have you been doing to your nose, sir?" asked Dick.

"My nose—ah, yes, my nose," replied Snarley, who had arranged with Armond that nothing should be said about the squabble at Kensington. "I am not aware that there is anything peculiar about the appearance of my nose."

"It's as big as two, sir."

"Possibly; now you come to remind me of it, I remember that I ran against something last night. How did we miss you?"

"The porter misdirected us, sir," said Dick, and we found out our mistake in time, while you didn't. I suppose you slept in town or found yourselves miles in the country."

"We were taken out of our way a little, but we spent a pleasant evening. Our separation was your loss, Lightheart," replied Snarley.

Dick thought they were not getting the truth or anything near it, out of the usher, nor were they.

He did not intend that they should know the adventures of the night, about which he would be made fun of behind his back, when they all returned to Harrow House School.

"Where is our tent?" inquired Mr. Snarley.

"That's it, sir," answered Dick, pointing to Captain Slaughter's.

"In—deed! quite a sumptuous affair. You have segars and wine, I perceive, on a side table," said Snarley lost in admiration.

"Those belong to a fellow who comes from Brighton, who pigs in with us."

"His name is"—began Snarley.

"Captain Slasher," replied Dick. "He's a jolly good fellow. Really a rattling good sort. Call him Slasher, and slap him on the back, that's what he likes."

"Is it, indeed?"

"Yes, sir. He's got any amount of money, and has come down here more for a spree than anything else."

"I will go in and rest my weary limbs," replied Mr. Snarley.

"Do, sir. No one will interfere with you."

"A glass of brandy and water will pick me up."

"Feel moppy, sir?" asked Dick.

"Not in the least. It's only the heat. Run you two as far as the printing tent; it is outside there that in a short time you will find Armond. Bring him back with you."

Dick and Messiter promised compliance, but they did not go far.

Choosing a position where they could see the usher without being seen by him, they stood perfectly still, anxiously waiting for what should happen.

They were burning with curiosity.

If Captain Slaughter would only return suddenly, and find Snarley enjoying himself in his tent, they thought they could die happy the next minute.

They saw Snarley enter the tent and pour out some brandy and water.

Then he lighted a choice Havana segar, and

throwing himself into an easy-chair, puffed away in all the delight of indolence.

He even went so far as to put his feet up against a richly-carved mahogany table.

Scarcely had he settled down to enjoy himself, sipping his brandy and water and looking out upon the common, where the targets were placed, than a shadow darkened the entrance of the tent.

Snarley did not get up.

He had been drinking more than he had been accustomed to, and he felt uncommonly lazy.

"It's Captain Slasher, of whom Lightheart spoke, I perceive," he muttered. "He said I was to treat him in a free and easy manner—all the better."

It was the captain, and if Mr. Snarley had seen the expression of his face, he would not have sat so comfortably in his arm-chair.

Nor have puffed away so placidly at the choice segar.

Nor have sipped the brandy and water with such contentment.

But Snarley did not remark the dark eye flash, nor the short mustache bristle, nor the thin lips quiver, nor the heavy frown settle on the brow.

All these things were lost upon him.

He simply said, with a half imbecile smile:

"Morning, Slasher; a nice day."

A sound like the snort of a frightened horse broke from the captain.

"He's got a cold," thought Snarley; I "wish he'd blow his nose—don't like people to go snorting about."

Then he waited for him to speak.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DIRTY KICK OUT.

"SNORTER wouldn't be a bad name for him," cried Mr. Snarley, carrying out his reflections.

"Lightheart said he was a jolly fellow. If so he will like chaff. I shall call him Snorter for fun."

At length the captain spoke.

"Who are you, sir?" he inquired.

"Name of Snarley, from Brighton, 101st Sussex," answered Snarley.

"What are you doing in my tent?"

"Your tent! Come that's a good joke; it's as much mine as your's," said Snarley.

"And these segars, this brandy and water, they ere yours, too, I suppose?" said the captain, with mild sarcasm.

"Of course. Share and share alike when we're out camping. Don't get nasty, Snorter."

"What do you mean by it?" said the captain, growing still more angry.

"Come, old fellow, sit down and make your miserable life happy," continued Snarley.

"If it wasn't Snnday, I'd give you a game at crib; best two out of three for a tanner, as my boys say."

"Will you get out of my tent, sir?" thundered the captain.

"No! certainly not; haven't the slightest intention of turning out of these comfortable quarters. You can go if you're in a bad temper."

"Hang me if I can understand it," cried the captain. "Here is a strange man who comes into my tent, drinks my brandy and smokes my cigars, and then tells me, like a cool fish as he is, to clear out if I don't like it."

"Have a weed?" asked Snarley, helping himself to another.

The captain could bear it no longer.

Making a dash at Snarley, he seized him by the arm, dragged him out of the chair, and kicked him toward the door.

"Out with you!" he exclaimed at every kick. "Be off."

Mr. Snarley turned round with a half-angry and supplicating look.

"I say," he said, "this won't do. It isn't friendly. Drop it, Snorter, there's a good fellow. It's carrying the joke a little too far."

"Joke be bothered," answered the captain; "get out."

Seeing he was in earnest, Mr. Snarley took to his heels and ran, followed by the captain, who gave him a parting kick, which raised him high in the air, and caused him to fall on his hands and knees, some distance from the tent.

Dick and Messiter had been enjoying the scene from their hiding-place, and when the fun was over, they ran to the printing tent where they found Armond.

In a short time they were joined by Mr. Snarley, who going furiously up to Dick, gave him a box on the ear.

"You young scamp!" he cried, red with passion. "What d you mean by sending me into the wrong tent?—from which I was shamefully expelled."

Getting out of reach of his arm, Dick answered:

"It was only a joke, sir."

"Deuce take you and your jokes," said Snarley, putting his hands behind him. "I was nearly killed by a savage wretch, who hasn't as much civility about him as an Irish bogtrotter."

"If you will go into other people's tents, sir," said Dick, "you must expect to get the dirty kick out."

"Very well. I shall mark you for this," Snarley replied, vindictively.

"Say no more about it, sir, and I will show you the real tent. I'm very sorry you got toed," Dick remarked, looking very contrite.

"You young crocodile, I—but no matter, my time will come. Lead on. Give me your support, Armond; I'm that sore, I could sit down upon the greensward and weep, and yet, on consideration, I'd rather shed tears standing; it would be a more easy position. How hard that captain fellow did kick, to be sure. He must have nails in his boots, the black-guard."

"There's the indignity of it, sir," said Armond, as he linked his arm in his.

"That I could put up with. It's the bodily discomfort I complain of."

"You must be on your guard against Lightheart," continued Armond.

"Yes. This is trick number two. He has not lost much time," Snarley answered, with a grim chuckle.

When they reached the tent, Mr. Snarley was disgusted at the plainness and simplicity of everything, which presented such a contrast to the luxurious fitting of Captain Slaughter's.

Throwing himself on a bed with a groan, he advised the boys to go to the church parade, and leave him to rest his aching bones.

Dick and Messiter got up to go.

"Will you have me?" asked Armond.

"Thank you, all the same; we'd rather go by ourselves," answered Dick.

"I shan't contaminate you," Armond remarked, looking hurt.

"I don't know. There is such a thing as moral leprosy, and I don't like it."

"Do you call me a moral leper?"

"If the cap fits you can wear it," replied Dick, carelessly.

Armond sat down near Mr. Snarley.

"How I do hate that Lightheart," he said; "he never loses a chance of insulting and galling me."

"He's a trying boy, and yet there are some things about him I like. He can be good and steady if he chooses," replied Snarley.

"I don't see what you have got to like him for," growled Armond.

"He is manly and straightforward. There is nothing sneaking about him."

"Which is as much as to say that there is about me. Thank you, sir."

"Not at all, my dear Armond," Mr. Snarley hastened to say; "you know how I regard you since you have been at the school; you have proved of great use to me."

Armond did not answer.

He sulked and puffed away at a briar-root pipe in silence; while the usher fell asleep and forgot his woes.

On Monday began the firing.

The three delegates from the Brighton Boys' Corps had entered for the Queen's prize.

They took their place in squads opposite the targets.

Suddenly Dick remembered that he had forgotten to provide himself with ammunition.

He mentioned his oversight to Messiter, who had been more thoughtful.

"I'm all right," said the latter.

"And I'm in the cart. Where do you get the ammunition?" asked Dick.

"At the tent, up there."

"I'm in the same position as Lightheart," exclaimed Armond. "We need not both go. I'll run up and get you some, and some for myself at the same time."

"Will you? That's kind," answered Dick. "If there's anything to pay, I'll settle with you afterwards."

Armond nodded and ran off.

He was not gone long, and when he returned, he handed Dick a paper of cartridges, with which he proceeded to load his rifle.

The firing went on all day.

Dick's practice was very fine indeed.

He made a bull's-eye nearly every time, and when he failed to do that, he scored a center.

Messiter was not so lucky.

Armond, however, stuck close to Dick, and the way in which the two Brighton Boys fired elicited general admiration.

At the conclusion of the day's shooting, it was officially announced that Lightheart, of the 101st Sussex, or Brighton Boys' Volunteers, was the winner. He had won the first stage of the Queen's.

What a triumph! and how proud he felt of it.

An official connected with the association came up and congratulated him, to the envy of many a bearded veteran.

"Allow me to look at your rifle," said the officer.

Dick did so.

It was a regulation rifle, and passed.

"Now your ammunition."

Dick handed him the cartridges he had left.

A frown came over the face of the officer, whose name was Crabbe.

"Where did you get these?" he asked.

"At the council's tent."

"Are you sure?"

"Well, I did not get them myself," Dick said; "I asked Mr. Armond, my comrade, here, to do so for me."

Armond was standing by, looking paler and more cadaverous than usual.

"Is this the man?" asked Captain Crabbe.

"Yes."

"The fact is," said Armond, "that I found that I had some cartridges, such as we use at the butts at Brighton, and I thought they would do, so I gave them to Lightheart."

"What did you use yourself?"

"Those I got at the tent in the morning," answered Armond.

The officer looked grave.

"I will go and report this to the Council of the Association," he said.

"What for, if I may ask?" inquired Dick, feeling anxious.

"If a man does not fire with the regulation cartridges provided by the Association, he is necessarily disqualified."

"I did not know that, and I thought it was all right when I sent Armond to the tent."

"Sorry for you. I will make my report, and you shall know the result in a few minutes."

With these words of ill-omen Captain Crabbe went away.

The utmost excitement prevailed during his absence.

Dick leant on his rifle and looked gloomily at the targets, which had had such a fascination for him all day long.

It was very hard to lose his hard-earned honors through a mistake.

Still it was just that every competitor should use the same ammunition, so that all might have an equal chance.

"Cheer up, old man. It may be all right yet," said Messiter.

Dick shook his head gloomily.

"They say Captain Crabbe is a good sort, and will do what he can for you."

"He's crabbed me, I'm afraid," Dick replied, with a sickly smile.

Armond did not come near Dick, but stood by himself.

A malicious twinkle appeared in his eye, and he smiled to himself at times, as if much pleased at something.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DICK IS DISQUALIFIED.

PRESENTLY the officer reappeared.

"Well, sir?" ejaculated Dick, whose heart was in his mouth.

"I regret to have to inform you that you are disqualified," replied the captain.

"And that means?"

"Simply that you must give way to the man next to you on the list. The Council cannot relax their rules in your favor, though you have their sincere sympathy."

The announcement fell like a thunderclap upon Dick.

"Don't be cast down, my lad," continued Captain Crabbe; "better luck next time. For such a good shot as you have proved yourself to be, there are plenty of prizes you can carry off with ease."

"I shall not fire another shot on this ground," Dick replied firmly.

"Don't say that," the captain said kindly. "I can understand your being put out at this unfortunate occurrence; but you must not give way. You've got the honor of making the best score, if you don't get the prize."

"Thank you, sir, for your good-nature," answered Dick, gulping down his grief.

"A word in your ear," Captain Crabbe continued.

He lowered his voice and added:

"Is this man a friend of yours?"

"Who—Armond?"

"Yes; that is his name, I think."

"No; an enemy. He hates me like steam," answered Dick.

"In that case, get your cartridges yourself next time. He was not fool enough to fire with the Brighton ammunition."

"Do you think he did it on purpose?"

"I say nothing," replied the captain. "But the circumstances look decidedly suspicious. Find me out; come to my tent this evening, will you? I shall be glad to see you, and will introduce you to some nice fellows."

With this he went on with the business of the meeting.

Armond's name was second on the list, and his cartridges being all right, he was declared the winner of the first stage of the Queen's Prize in the place of Lightheart disqualified.

The camp was now full of volunteers and their friends; ladies walked about with their brothers, sisters, and sweethearts, who showed them every object of interest.

Dick had wandered away behind a tent, where no one saw him, and there he sat down.

Messiter had missed him.

Dick was glad to be alone.

There are times when the society of one's fellow-creatures is absolutely unbearable.

He had received a great blow.

The more he thought over the matter, the more sure he felt that Armond was the cause of his trouble.

He had been purposely supplied with the ammunition, which he ought not to have used.

His vanity had been flattered at beating so many crack shots.

How hard he had practised to be able to do this.

How often had he fondly dreamed of triumphs at Wimbledon which should win him the applause of friends and enemies alike.

When the cup of success was raised to his lips, fortune had dashed it rudely away.

If Armond could have seen him as he sat hidden away behind the tent, he would have been rid of half his hatred, for he would have felt the sweets of revenge.

It was growing late.

How long he had been in his present position he did not know.

Suddenly he heard voices.

Some ladies were speaking to a gentleman in the tent behind which he had thrown himself down in his fit of disappointment.

"Who did you say won the Queen's Prize?" asked a lady.

"It's not won yet, Lady Mary. We have only decided the first stage," was the reply.

"Never mind the technicalities, my dear Captain Crabbe," answered Lady Mary. "Tell me all about it."

"With pleasure. It was actually won by a boy, quite a youth, I can assure you, named Lightheart, but the prize has gone to one a year or two his senior, whose name is Armond."

Dick listened almost without meaning it.

He became interested in it when he found he was the subject of the conversation.

The tent to which he was so close was, he could not doubt, Captain Crabbe's.

"Armond, what a pretty name. I declare I could fall in love with Armond without seeing him," said another lady.

"I don't think you would," replied the captain.

"Why not?"

"He is not an estimable sort of young man at all. Quite the contrary. I, for one, have a positive horror of the young rascal."

"Who, Lightheart or Armond?" inquired Lady Mary.

"Armond. The other is a fine fellow."

"Do please tell us all about it," cried the ladies in chorus.

"With pleasure; but first of all, can I offer you any more champagne or claret? My man has just brought a fresh supply in."

The ladies declined.

Captain Crabbe resumed his story.

"We have a rule," he said, "that every one firing for a prize must use the ammunition supplied by us. Lightheart sent Armond for some cartridges, and Armond gave him some he had brought with him, which were not what we call regulation."

"What a shame," said Lady Mary.

"The worst is to come. Lightheart was declared the winner, and it did me good to see his handsome young face light up with pride and joy at the announcement."

"Poor boy. I am sorry he lost it," said her ladyship.

Dick felt grateful to her in his heart for those kind words.

"This Armond," continued the captain, "came up to me and slipped a piece of paper into my hand at the conclusion of the firing."

"What for?"

"To request me to examine Lightheart's cartridges. This showed me, when I heard all, that Armond had premeditated the whole thing."

"Does Lightheart know this?"

"He does not; what was the use of causing enmity between them? I crumpled up the paper and let it fall at my feet near the firing place."

"I don't like Armond a bit now; but I feel I should like to kiss Lightheart," said the young lady, adding, "that is, if he's not too big."

"I have asked him to give me a look up this evening," said the captain.

"Will he come while we're here?"

"I don't know. Perhaps he will not come at all. He seemed awfully cut up."

"No wonder," said Lady Mary. "Why did you not let him have the prize after all?"

"I could not do so; though I assure you, that I never accomplished any duty so reluctantly in my life before, as I did that of disqualifying Lightheart, and declaring Armond the winner."

Dick waited to hear no more of this conversation, but, with a bound, sprang to his feet.

Dick walked away, and sought the spot from which the firing had taken place. It was deserted now.

With the utmost care he searched in every direction for a piece of paper which had been written upon.

The ground was strewn with little bits of paper of all kinds; some were cartridge papers, some had notes on them, and so on.

At length, just as it was getting dark, Dick uttered a cry.

He had picked up what he was seeking for.

Holding it up to the clear and lovely moonlight to make sure, he read it.

The contents were as follows:

"SIR,—I beg to inform you that Lightheart, the winner of the first stage of the Queen's, has not been using the regulation cartridge. On examination, you will find evidence to disqualify him. I am, sir, yours, C. A., of the B.B.V., or 101st Sussex.

P. S.—This is strictly private."

When Dick had read this, with compressed lips, he smoothed it out, and put it in his pocket.

"The base scoundrel," he muttered; "he's like a snake. But this letter is something; I'll say it came from Captain Crabbe."

Feeling very faint and thirsty, for he had only indulged in one glass of bitter all day, he wandered to the refreshment saloon, where he was soon engaged in discussing the merits of cold duck and beer.

He had scarcely finished his repast, when he was tapped on the shoulder by Messiter.

"Hullo, old cock!" he exclaimed; "where have you been hiding?"

"I'm down on my luck, Harry," answered Dick.

"So I thought. What a dance you've given me. I've been everywhere after you."

"Where's Snarley?"

"He and Armond are over there in that corner. Don't you see Snarley spooning the fair-haired girl behind the bar?"

"I see."

"Armond has got several admirers since he won the first stage."

"Since he chiselled me out of it, you mean," said Dick indignantly.

"Just as you like. But he has won it, fairly or unfairly, and his new friends are standing him champagne like one o'clock."

"Snarley's by way of getting tight, isn't he?" asked Dick.

"So is Armond. He's awfully cocky about his shooting. He boasted so about what he had done that I had to cut away from him."

"Ask him if he ever shot wild ducks at Whitechapel."

"It was a beastly chouse his giving you those wrong cartridges, but he swears he did not mean it," said Messiter.

"He's a——" began Dick.

"Draw it mild," interrupted Messiter.

"I'll say he's a perverter of the truth, if that will please you. Read this note which he gave to Captain Crabbe."

Messiter looked at the note, and was much disgusted.

"It was a planned thing," he said.

"Of course; you can see it was a plant," exclaimed Dick. "Let's have a beer."

They ordered some beer, and Armond, seeing Dick, came up and said:

"Oh, Lightheart, I'm glad to see you. So sorry you did not get the prize. Will you divide the money with me?"

"That's generous, I like that. It shows a good spirit," observed Mr. Snarley.

"No, exclaimed Dick, surlily.

"Don't be riled, old fellow," continued Armond. "I'm awfully grieved that I gave you the wrong cartridges: but I had not read the rules."

"Ah, stupid not to read rules," said Snarley.

"Gentlemen," said Dick, addressing the volunteers who were standing by, and who had been making such a fuss with Armond, "I have obtained this letter, which is written by Mr.

Armond to Captain Crabbe. Read it, if you please, and then tell me if he has not been guilty of the basest conduct."

A volunteer took it from him and read it aloud.

There were murmurs of indignation.

Mr. Snarley looked over the reader's shoulder, and said:

"It is Armond's writing, and bears his signature, sure enough. This looks very bad."

"I know nothing about it," Armond said, looking as pale as a sheet.

"After this, I must decline any further association with you, Mr. Armond," remarked the volunteer.

"And I! and I!" cried others.

"You have behaved like a cad, and it is plain that you plotted to get your friend and school-fellow disqualified," continued the first speaker.

The volunteers all turned their backs upon him.

"Why did you come and expose me like this?" asked Armond, wild with rage.

"Because you deserve it. You have played me dirty tricks before now, and I'll take care you don't shoot any more at this meeting," exclaimed Dick.

"You can't prevent me, my dear fellow," answered Armond, sneering.

"Yes, I can."

"How?"

"By bunging both your eyes up, which I mean to do. So mind yourself, for here goes."

As Dick spoke, he struck Armond as hard as he could in the face, and followed up the blow by another and another.

"Mr. Snarley—gentlemen," cried Armond, staggering up for the fourth time. "Save me! Don't let him do it! Help! help!"

Dick rushed at him again, and this time put his head under his arm, getting him in chancery, and pounding away savagely at him.

In vain he kicked and struggled.

It was all of no use.

At last Dick thought he had punished him enough, and let him fall down in a heap, bleeding and disfigured.

Both eyes were beginning to puff up and swell; his nose was bleeding profusely, and a tooth that stuck in his throat made him cough and choke alarmingly.

"There, Mr. Cocky Armond, B. B., you'll crab me again, will you?" said Dick.

Cries of "Serve him right!" "Do the sneak good!" arose on all sides.

Dick took Messiter's arm and strode away, leaving Mr. Snarley to care for Armond.

"Snarley can look after his pet sneak, and they may mingle their tears together," remarked Dick.

"What a welting you gave him! Poor beggar, he'll be as blind as a kitten for a week," said Messiter.

"It's his own fault. He shouldn't do such shabby things. I never felt so happy in my life as when I was hiding him."

"I shouldn't have liked to have had it," observed Messiter.

"As if I would touch you, dear old boy," answered Dick, affectionately.

"Armond would murder you if he got the chance."

"I believe he would," Dick answered thoughtfully. "He's just the sort of man to do it. I should not like to take a lonely walk with him on the downs, and go too near the cliffs; he'd push me over."

"That's a moral," said Messiter. "Shy him in future as much as you can."

"I always do fight shy of him. You and Brabazon are the only fellows I pal up with. Now, what's the next excitement?"

"Can't say. I'm game for anything, from marbles to manslaughter."

"Let's have a lark with Snarley. Come back to quarters."

"All serene," said Messiter; and they returned to their tent.

Mr. Snarley and Armond had arrived before them, as they had patronized the camp tramway, and the others had walked leisurely along.

Armond was lying on his back, with a raw beefsteak on each eye.

Mr. Snarley had been drinking champagne until he was inclined to be merry with any one and over anything.

"Here comes the great prizefighter," he said; "the man of fists and muscles. You have done for poor Armond. He is a settled member."

"Glad to hear it," answered Dick.

"Come, come, don't be too hard on the poor fellow. Be jolly, Lightheart. You have disturbed the harmony of the evening. Those volunteers were paying for champagne like gentlemen, before you came up," said Mr. Snarley.

"I only want him to understand that I'm not going to be messed about and badgered by a tripe-boiling cad like that," answered Dick.

Armond was too much cowed to be able to say anything.

Dick's onslaught was so sudden and irresistible, that he was quite knocked out of time.

Under other circumstances he might have answered him back again.

"You're getting quite a desperate fellow," Mr. Snarley went on. "But I shall say nothing about it at home."

"I shall," replied Dick.

"Forget and forgive, that's what I say."

Messiter whispered to Dick:

"Snarley's half cocked."

But, low as was his voice, the usher overheard the remark.

"If you mean, Messiter, that I have had too much to drink, you are mistaken," he observed. "Instead of having too much, I have had a drop too little, and will refresh myself from this little flask."

He produced a pocket flask, and drank.

"Come outside, sir," said Dick; "I have something to say to you, if you don't mind."

Mr. Snarley followed him outside.

"What is it, Lightheart?" he inquired.

"Will you go in for the Windmill Prize, sir? I know you can shoot a little," said Dick.

"Have I any chance?"

"Certainly. It is open to all comers."

"When does it take place?" asked the usher.

"Men fire every night, just before it gets dark. Take my rifle, and come on. Don't lose any time, sir."

Mr. Snarley was just in the humor to do any silly thing, for he had drunk sufficient to make him half stupid.

"Give me the rifle. Who's afraid?" he cried.

Dick handed him the rifle and led the way to the old windmill.

Most of the men in camp were in their tents, talking, singing, or playing whist.

What may be called the streets of the camp were nearly deserted.

When they reached the windmill, Dick said:

"Shoot up high, sir. Here are cartridges. You are entitled to half a dozen shots. You must try to hit the woodwork at the top."

"I'll hit it," replied Snarley, levelling his rifle.

"Blaze away, sir," replied Dick.

Mr. Snarley prepared to do so.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A COOL SHOT AT THE WINDMILL.

It was nearly half-past nine.

Every one in the camp was enjoying himself quietly after the fatigue of the day.

There were few stragglers in the neighborhood of the old windmill.

Mr. Snarley pulled the trigger and fired.

The sound of the shot reverberated through the camp with startling distinctness.

"That's [one," he said, putting in another cartridge.

He fired again.

"That's two," he muttered. "I wonder who's scoring. Where's Lightheart? Trouble some boy that."

He looked round, but Dick was nowhere to be seen.

"I'll have another go. Rather fun, this Windmill Prize shooting. No crowd, nor bother!"

The sound of footsteps coming toward him in all directions fell upon his ears.

"It seems I'm making a sensation; here goes for number three," said Snarley.

This time he missed.

"Wide of the mark, try again. This gun kicks a little," he remarked to himself.

Suddenly he was surrounded by an excited crowd.

A gentleman rudely took his rifle from him, exclaiming:

"Who is this lunatic?"

Mr. Snarley stared at him.

"Name of Snarley," he replied.

"Does anyone know the lunatic?" continued the gentleman.

"Lunatic yourself. Who are you calling lunatics?" exclaimed Snarley, "Stand on one side, I want another shot. Give me my gun."

"Call a file of the guard," said the gentleman.

"Who are you?" inquired Snarley defiantly.

"I am Major Wildmay, secretary of the Association."

"I don't care for you, if you were half-a-dozen secretaries. Can you fight? I can. Come on; come on, all of you."

"He must be mad," remarked a bystander.

The crowd increased every moment.

"What are you taking cool shots at the mill for?" asked Major Wildmay.

He wanted to keep the supposed madman in conversation, until the guard came up.

"I went in for the Windmill Prize, and if I haven't made a center, I've scored two outers," replied Snarley.

At this declaration there was a roar of laughter from the spectators.

The excitement and the drink he had imbibed were beginning to tell upon the usher.

"Give 'sh th' gun," he said.

The crowd roared again.

"He's tight," remarked one.

"Screwed as an owl," observed another.

"Gun, please. Give 'sh gun," continued Snarley, whose voice was getting thick and husky.

The volunteers, who had left their tents owing to the sound of the firing, which was strictly forbidden hours before that, began to consider the whole affair a good joke.

At this moment the guard came up and placed themselves on each side of Snarley, whom they took in custody.

"What going to do now?" asked the usher, with an imbecile chuckle.

"Turn him out of the camp neck and crop," said the secretary, "and give strict orders that he is not to be admitted again."

"Well, that's cool," remarked Snarley. "I'm a volunteer."

"Where from?" inquired the secretary.

"Brightonsh—101st Sussexsh Volunteersh. There is a fellow who knows me," added Snarley, espying Dick in the crowd.

He pointed out Lighthouse.

"Step forward, sir," said Major Wildmay.

Dick did so.

"Do you know this man?" continued the major.

"Never saw him before, to my knowledge," answered Dick.

"Are you a Brighton volunteer?"

"Yes."

"So you do not recognize this man?"

"Not in the least. It's my impression he's a rank outsider," answered Dick.

"Mr. Snarley was stupefied.

"Well, I'm blest," he rejoined, as Dick stepped back. "Thish is becoming funny. It ish a night of adventurish."

"March," said Major Wildmay, adding, "you may consider yourself lucky, my man, to be so leniently dealt with. Take him."

Mr. Snarley was marched through wondering

crowds, collected at every point, and rudely cast out in the outer darkness of the common.

He looked about him with a puzzled expression.

"Very curioush thing," he muttered. "What did they take me—some mistake—make them apologise in the morning."

A belated fly-driver saw him and said:

"Fly, sir?"

"No, sir," replied Snarley; "not being a bird, I cannot fly, neither have my legsh any inclination to walk. I will ride. Assist me into your—hic—vehic—hic—hicle, and take me to the nearest hotel—hic."

The driver, with a smile, helped him inside, and drove him to the best place of accommodation in Wimbledon.

Here he got a bed, and soon went fast asleep, dreaming that he was fighting a duel with the secretary of the Association, who suddenly turned into a windmill, by which he was ground into powder, and made into bread.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DANGEROUS LUNATIC.

WHEN Dick, to his great delight, had seen the usher expelled from the camp, he returned to his tent, and calling out Messiter told him the news.

"We shall not hear of or see him again until the morning," he concluded, "so let's have a game at cards and then go to roost."

Messiter was agreeable, and they played until it was time to put out the light.

In the morning they woke early, but early as it was, Armond was not to be seen in his bed.

His bag, too, was gone.

On the foot of Mr. Snarley's bed lay a letter, which Dick espied.

"Armond's eloped," said Messiter.

"It looks like it. Here's a letter, which I shall take the liberty of opening," said Dick.

He broke the envelope and read:

"Dear sir, after the brutal treatment I received last night at the hands of that savage, Lighthouse."

"That's neat," put in Messiter.

"I have made up my mind not to stay in camp any longer," continued Dick, reading, "and I shall go to my father's private residence in the Roman Road, Bow, where you can hear of me until I get better, or if you will favor us with a visit, I shall be delighted to see you. As you did not sleep in tent last night, I am anxious about you, and hope nothing has happened, though we are none of us safe with that blackguard Lighthouse."

"Hasn't he got his knife into you?" said Messiter, adding: "Is that all?"

"That's finis," replied Dick.

"The sweep! I'm glad he's gone. What shall we do now? We're like the babes in the wood. Hadn't we better go home?"

"Not yet. I haven't done with Snarley," answered Dick.

"What's the next move on the board?"

"You'll see, if you live long enough. Get up, and come out with me."

The boys were not long dressing, and Dick led the way outside the camp, where he looked about for a cab.

Seeing one, he said to the driver:

"Isn't there a lunatic asylum here?"

"Yes, sir; on the common—not far off—Dr. Dismal's replied the man.

"Very well. I shall want to be driven there in an hour or two—say ten o'clock. Wait for me," said Dick.

Going into camp again, the boys had their breakfast, and, as Dick expected, in a short time a note reached them from Mr. Snarley.

It was dated "Rifle Hotel, Wimbledon."

"DEAR ARMOND,—I fear Lighthouse played me a shameful trick last night. He took me out to shoot at the windmill for a prize, and having had more wine than usual, I have come to the conclusion that I made a fool of myself. However, let that pass. We must go home at

once; our trip has ended disastrously. Bring Lighthouse and Messiter, with the baggage, to this hotel. I cannot come to you, as I was expelled from the camp last night, and ordered not to enter it again.

"Ever yours,

"SAMUEL SNARLEY."

"Now we know where he's put up, we'll go and see Dr. Dismal," said Dick, having finished the perusal of the letter.

"What for?" asked Messiter.

"To get Snarley locked up as a lunatic. I shall tell Dr. Dismal that he is of weak intellect, and escaped from Brighton, having followed us up here. Leave me to pitch a tale into him.

"Will they take him, do you think?"

"I'll bet you a new hat on it," replied Dick.

In half an hour they were driven to Dr. Dismal's house.

Dick told the doctor his story, saying that Mr. Snarley's friends were very respectable, and would pay well for his kindness in looking after him.

He related the affair of the windmill, and referred him to Major Wildmay if he wanted corroboration.

"What I want you to do, sir," Dick added, "is to send a man to capture Mr. Snarley, who is dangerous at large."

"Ah, I perceive; sad case, very," said the doctor.

"When captured, send him to Professor Simcox, at Harrow House, Kemp Town, Brighton."

"Is that a private lunatic asylum?"

"It is, sir. Snarley escaped from there. I know all his family, and am sincerely sorry for him."

"It shall be done at once. One of our best men must go to the Rifle Hotel," said Dr. Dismal.

"I fear, sir, the strait-waistcoat must be used if he shows signs of violence," continued Dick.

"Ah, yes, I must give orders. Fancy shooting at the windmill. Dear, dear, sheer insanity. Thank you, young gentlemen; the interest you take in your acquaintance is highly creditable to you."

"I only do my duty, sir," answered Dick, modestly.

"Rest assured, he shall be stopped before he can do any more mischief. Fire at the windmill indeed! Dear, dear! it's a mercy he has not taken human life."

With these words the doctor bowed them out, and Dick went off with Messiter, highly delighted with the result of the interview.

The boys returned to the camp, watched the shooting for an hour or two, had some dinner, and then seeking the railway station, took tickets to return to Brighton.

"What shall we say about Snarley?" asked Messiter.

"Say he left us to ourselves, and we thought it best to come home. He will be sent back to Brighton directly, and get there almost as soon as we, I'll bet," answered Dick.

"Won't he swear!"

"Come," said Dick. "We shall catch it, I expect. But no matter; they can't kill us, and he shouldn't have been such an ass as to go shooting at windmills."

The train hurried them away to Brighton, where they were not expected yet.

Mr. Simcox had been informed by the morning papers of Armond's success for the first stage of the Queen's as well as of Dick's plucky shooting.

All the school was jubilant at the success of the Harrow House boys, and hoped they would do better yet.

They little thought that a chapter of accidents had brought their promising career to a close.

We must return to Mr. Snarley, who was taking his ease at his inn while his pupils were plotting against his peace of mind, and threatening his liberty.

It was little after eleven when a stout, thick-

set, burly man, accompanying Dr. Dismal, took up a position in the bar of the Rifle Hotel.

His name was Slogger, and he was a keeper in the lunatic asylum.

"Keep within call," said the doctor, in a loud tone.

Slogger nodded his head.

Going to the bar, Dr. Dismal said:

"Ah, pardon me; have you a gentleman of the name of Snarley here?"

"Yes, sir," said the barmaid; "that is the name of the gentleman who came in last night."

"Can I see him?"

"Certainly," said the barmaid, ringing the bell for the waiter.

"Never mind the name," added Dr. Dismal,

"Very well, sir. Here, John, show the gentleman to No. 9."

The waiter who had just answered the bell bowed to Dr. Dismal, whom he knew by sight.

"Anything wrong, sir?" inquired John.

"Have you noticed anything peculiar about this person?" asked the doctor.

"No. 9, sir? Gentleman name of Snarley."

"Yes."

"Well, I must say, he's a rum sort of gent. He comes in rolling tight last night, and goes straight off to bed with his boots on."

"Ah! bad sign that," remarked Dr. Dismal, shaking his head.

"Then he goes in a reg'lar buster this morning for seltzer and hock, and shies the bottle at my head for putting no ice in it," continued John.

"Just so. Tell Slogger to follow me up-stairs. Is Snarley a strongly-built man?"

"Wiry, sir; not of much good in a tussle, I should think," said John.

"Very good—thank you."

Knocking at the door of No. 9, a faint voice replied, "Come in."

Dr. Dismal entered.

Snarley saw a tall, thin man, dressed in black, the very image of himself, and bowed.

The doctor returned the bow.

"Whom may I have the honor of speaking to?" said Snarley.

"I am Dr. Dismal, of Wimbledon," was the reply.

A sudden thought flashed across Snarley's mind.

"I suppose you are proprietor of the windmill," he said, "and want compensation for it being shot at."

"Precisely," returned the doctor.

"Then you won't get it. I'm not to be imposed upon. It's like your impudence to come to my room. Get out."

"My dear sir, calm these transports," said the doctor.

"I will not. I have been made a fool of enough already, and you shall not get a shilling out of me," cried Snarley.

"It is all for your good, believe me. I am your friend, and will send you back to Brighton—think of that, my dear sir."

"You be hanged, you insulting old man; I wouldn't know you," cried Snarley, getting angry.

"Listen to me," urged the doctor.

"I wouldn't have you as a gift."

"Be reasonable. I repeat I am your friend."

"I wouldn't pick you up in the street. Get out of my room," vociferated Snarley, who thought he smelt a rat, and that Lightheart was playing some new trick upon him, as in reality he was.

"Ah," said Dr. Dismal, "this a pity—but when gentle means fail we must have recourse to harsh measures."

Going to the door, he cried "Slogger."

The big, burly, broad-chested man entered. Snarley took up the poker and brandished it over his head.

"Shall I go in, sir?" asked Slogger.

"Yes. Confine him in the waistcoat—quick, or he will do us an injury."

Slogger made a circuit of the room and took Mr. Snarley in the rear.

In an instant he was down on his back, and made helpless by being confined in the dis-

trressing folds of a strait-waistcoat, which effectually prevented him from making any further demonstration with the poker.

Slogger with a quiet smile lifted him up and put him on a chair.

"What is the meaning of this outrage, my good sir?" demanded the usher.

"We are going to restore you to your friends at Harrow House, Kemp Town, Brighton," answered Dr. Dismal.

"I was going there myself. What is to prevent me going by myself, you stupid old lunatic? What do you come meddling with me for?"

"Slogger will explain to you. He has his instructions. Good morning."

With these words Dr. Dismal vanished.

Turning to his keeper, Snarley said:

"Does he think I'm mad?"

"Something like it. Are you ready to come to the station?" asked Slogger.

"Not yet, I'm waiting for my friends."

"Do you mean two young gentlemen—volunteers?"

"Yes."

"They're all right. It was those who came to the governor this morning, and told all about your escaping from Brighton."

Mr. Snarley groaned.

"Lead on," he said with a sigh. "Take me away; do what you like with me. I am the victim of that wretched boy again."

Slogger wondered at his captive's sudden resignation, but remembering he had his duty to perform, ordered a fly for the station.

He was induced to take off the waistcoat, as Mr. Snarley promised faithfully to be quiet.

"The fit's over now, and if it comes on again, I can master him," thought Slogger.

During the journey, Snarley was excited, and anxious.

It was a real relief to him when they reached Brighton, and drove to Harrow House.

He wanted to run in, but Slogger held him tightly by the arm.

"I must give you up to the principal," he said.

They were shown into the drawing-room, the maid servant saying:

"Oh! Mr. Snarley, is it you, sir?"

"Ask Mr. Simcox to come here at once," replied the usher.

When they were alone, Slogger said:

"Have you many here?"

"About seventy-five boys in all."

"Boys! Lunatics you mean."

"I don't. It's a school. You've been hoaxed," replied Snarley.

Slogger shrugged his shoulders, as if he knew better than that.

Presently Mr. Simcox entered.

"Ha! Snarley," he said, shaking his hand.

"Glad to see you. Glorious news in the paper this morning. Splendid shooting. Where are the boys, and why this early return?"

"Ask this man!" exclaimed Snarley, turning savagely upon the keeper.

Mr. Simcox looked inquiringly at Slogger.

"I've brought him back safe, sir," he exclaimed, feeling it incumbent upon him to say something.

"Brought him back—what do you mean?"

"He got loose in the camp, sir, and was found shooting at the windmill."

"Got loose—windmill—dear me, I am at a loss to understand you," said Mr. Simcox, looking from one to the other.

"It's easily explained, sir," remarked Mr. Snarley, putting on a smile.

"First of all, permit me to question this person. Who are you?" said the professor to Slogger.

"Head keeper at Dr. Dismal's asylum at Wimbledon, sir."

"Do you think Mr. Snarley mad?"

"You ought to know, since you keep an asylum," said Slogger.

"I keep an asylum!" exclaimed the professor, in horror. "My establishment is an academy for young gentlemen."

"What!" cried Slogger.

"I repeat, this is a school, and Mr. Snarley

is one of my ushers, who went up to Wimbledon with three of our best shots."

"Then the governor and I've been sold," exclaimed Slogger, looking crest-fallen; "we've been had alive. Oh, my! won't he go on? We've been had like lambs. Oh, Jerusalem! here's a go."

Mr. Snarley sat down in a chair in triumph. He felt that his troubles were over.

"Explain this to me," said the professor.

"I can't," said Slogger.

"And I'm sure I can't. You must wait till Lightheart turns up; he's at the bottom of it all."

"All I can say, sir," observed Slogger, "is this; we received information this morning that a dangerous lunatic, who had been expelled from the camp, was at large at the Rifle Hotel, Wimbledon, and we were requested to convey him back to Brighton, your address being given."

"By whom?"

"Two young gentlemen volunteers."

Turning to the usher, Mr. Simcox exclaimed: "Mr. Snarley, I must ask you what you did to be expelled from the camp?"

"We had been celebrating Armond's victory, sir."

"Which means, I suppose, that you had been drinking too much."

"I fear, so, sir; at all events, Lightheart persuaded me that the Windmill Prize was shot for by moonlight, and I blazed away at the old mill; the consequence being that I was turned out of the camp."

"You are totally unfit for the command of youth, over whom you cannot maintain a proper control. I shall consider whether I shall retain you in my employ or not," replied Mr. Simcox, in a tone of wrath.

"Yours is not the only school in the world, my dear sir," retorted Mr. Snarley.

"And you are not everybody's money, allow me to remind you, Mr. Snarley."

"Don't talk to me, sir," cried the usher.

"Go to your own apartments," thundered the professor.

"I shall not. I mean to go to some hotel and have my dinner, and pay for it like a man," answered Snarley.

Snarley moved toward the door, but he had scarcely reached it before Mr. Simcox ran after him, and touched him on the shoulder.

"Your hand, Snarley," he said.

"I give it freely," replied the usher. But

"Say no more. I have been hasty, and I admit it."

"And I too have been in fault. I have had my trials since I left this house, and it is too much, sir, to be turned round upon by you."

"Snarley, you were with me when I started this school, with six boys, one of whom didn't pay. No matter. We must not quarrel. Go and dine where you like, and I will pay the bill."

"A chop, sir; a humble chop will content me, cooked in your own kitchen," replied Snarley.

"Stay. I have ducks for my dinner in half an hour."

The professor took Slogger, the keeper, into a corner of the room, and told him how the case really stood.

Slogger was speedily convinced, and receiving a small gratuity from Mr. Simcox, promised to explain the mistake to Dr. Dismal.

He took his departure, and shortly afterward dinner was served, to which the professor and Snarley sat down together, Mrs. Simcox being out on a visit.

Some capital ox-tail soup preceded the ducks and green peas, which were followed by cherry tart, and washed down with a bottle of sherry.

For some time Mr. Simcox was silent.

At length he said:

"What is to be done with that boy?"

"Lightheart, you mean, sir," replied Mr. Snarley.

"Yes. He is not altogether to blame. You have been foolish, and from your own account,

Armond behaved like a villain, and deserved the thrashing he got."

"Will you not punish him for sending me to the wrong train, and making me shoot at the windmill?"

"I do not see how I can justly do so."

"Then again, he had me sent home as a dangerous lunatic, in charge of a keeper," said the usher.

"You must confess that you did not behave like a sane man," answered the professor.

"Why did you not make your own inquiries?—you know the boy's tendencies to practical joking."

"Then you do not propose to do anything to him?"

"All that has taken place happened out of my jurisdiction. I shall take no notice of what he has done, and I must say that you have only yourself to thank for your mishaps."

Mr. Snarley looked disappointed.

"Well, sir," he said, "I must bow to your decision."

There was a ring at the bell, and the servant announced the return of Masters Lighthouse and Messiter.

"I am glad to hear they have come back," exclaimed Mr. Simcox. "Snarley, retire. I will see Lighthouse."

The usher went away, and Dick was ushered into the awful presence of the head master.

Mr. Simcox spoke kindly to him, and extracted from him a true account of all that had happened.

"Now, sir," concluded Dick, "you know all, what are you going to do with me?"

"I will merely make one request, Lighthouse," replied the professor, "and it is this: Try and keep your mischievous propensities within bounds. Will you promise me this?"

"I can't help having larks with Snarley, sir," answered Dick. "He is such a baby."

"Remember he is your tutor, and you should treat him with respect."

"So I do in school, sir; but in camp it was different."

"Well, run away, and play. I depend upon your good sense and honor to behave as well as you can while under my roof. Recollect that you are growing up, and bad seed sown in youth is difficult to root up in manhood. Go. I am not pleased with you."

Dick was more cut up by the kind way in which he was spoken to by the head master, than he would have been by harsh measures.

He made a resolve that he would endeavor to deserve his kindness.

How he kept his word we shall see.

CHARTER XXIX.

THE DEVIL'S DYKE.

WHEN Dick left Mr. Simcox, he went toward the school-room, but was intercepted in the passage by Mr. Snarley.

"There is my hand, Lighthouse," said the usher, "let bygones be bygones."

"Certainly, sir. I have behaved badly, and am sorry for it. Can you forgive me?"

"Freely. You can see I have done so; through my intercession with Mr. Simcox, you have escaped punishment."

"Did you ask him to let me off?"

"I did," replied Snarley. "My dear boy, I bear no malice in my heart. The professor was furious, and wanted to have you flogged, but I begged him to take a more lenient view of your conduct."

Dick had no means of disproving this statement, though from his private knowledge of the usher's character, he was not quite inclined to believe it.

"I feel much obliged, sir," he said; "I will try to deserve your kindness."

"I only ask one return," answered Snarley, "and that is this: Do not make more fun of my adventures than you can help when talking to the boys. I have a horror of being laughed at?"

"Very well, sir. I'll let you down easy," replied Dick, smiling.

In spite of this understanding, however, he made the boys laugh when he told them what had taken place in camp.

Armond did not return for ten days, and even then there were bluish-green circles round his little pig-like eyes.

Dick avoided him as much as he could, saying:

"He has been home, and he smells of stale tripe. He is not nice."

In a week or two the Wimbledon journey was forgotten.

All the boys were thinking of a promised treat which Mr. Simcox had arranged.

It was a picnic at the Devil's Dyke.

This famous gulley or gorge in the Downs was to be reached by the boys in two large omnibuses, and they were to take provisions with them.

They started at ten in the morning, and Dick bought a long horn to blow on the road.

He called this his yard of tin.

The King's Road echoed again with the shrill blast he blew on the horn.

He and Messiter were in high spirits.

The day was gloriously fine, and the ground quite dry enough to sit and loll upon without danger.

When, after a drive of about nine miles, they reached the solitary public known, as the "Dyke House," the boys were told that they might wander about where they liked till two o'clock.

At that hour dinner would be ready in some sheltered spot which the master would select in the meantime.

Dick and Messiter walked away arm-in-arm together.

"There they go," remarked Fowler.

"These two fellows are inseparable."

"They are really friends," said Brabazon.

"I never saw any boys more attached to one another."

Armond overheard the conversation.

"Quite touching, isn't it?" he said with a sneer. "All the friendships of antiquity pale before it."

"I don't know about it being 'touching,'" said Brabazon. "Perhaps you'd like to have a friend."

Armond winched at this.

He knew that lately there was not a boy in the school who really liked him except his brother.

Presently all the boys paired off together, or went in groups somewhere.

Armond was left alone.

Then the force of Brabazon's remark came home to him, and he felt what it was to want a friend.

A terrible sense of loneliness oppressed him. Going into the "Dyke house," he had some brandy, and lighting his pipe, strolled away for a solitary ramble.

He descended the side of the dyke, and seemed to try to get right away from everybody and revel in his loneliness.

Meanwhile Dick and Messiter enjoyed the magnificent prospect mapped out before them on this clear, bright, sunshiny day.

"Look at the dyke, Dick," said Messiter; "what a huge hollow it is. I wonder how it came to be made."

"They say the devil dug it out in a single night," replied Dick.

"That's all nonsense, isn't it?"

"I should think so. It is more likely the result of some earthquake, ages ago."

"Do you know what I should like to do with it?" said Messiter.

"No; what?"

"Build up a wall on each side and then fill it with water. Wouldn't it make a splendid bathing-place?"

"Rather. Not a bad idea. We will lay it before the mayor of Brighton," replied Dick, laughing. "Suppose we go down the side."

"There's the beastly bother of getting up again."

"You lazy beggar; it will do you good, and take your fat down a bit," answered Dick.

After a little hesitation Messiter allowed himself to be persuaded, and they descended the precipitous side of the dyke.

When they reached the bottom, Dick said:

"Let's sit down here. No master can see us. Eh!"

"Not a little bit."

"That's right. Now I am going to try a dodge I've had in my mind for some time past."

He drew sundry paper parcels from his pocket, and began to unwrap them.

First of all he disclosed a handsome briar-root pipe; secondly, a neat parcel filled with bird's-eye; and thirdly, a little German silver box, containing fuses.

"You're never going to smoke, Dick," cried Messiter.

"I am, though," replied Dick.

"Oh, won't you shoot the cat, that's all?"

"Shall I? It don't follow that because some fellows with weak stomachs are sick, that I must eat over my first pipe."

"Well, replied Messiter, "I wouldn't do it for a prize."

"You shall have a puff if you're good. Did you see the men smoking at Wimbledon, and how happy they seemed over it?"

"Yes."

"Didn't they have to learn?"

"I suppose so."

"Very well then, everything must have a beginning, and this is my start. If I turn up, you can chaff; but until then, oblige me by keeping that potato-trap of yours closed," said Dick.

He filled his pipe, struck a vesuvian and lighted it.

Messiter watched with great anxiety.

For a time he puffed away bravely, and the smoke curled upward in little rings.

"It's lucky when the smoke makes rings in the air, I've heard," he said.

"Is it?" replied Dick; "that's another of your old woman's stories, Harry."

How do you like it?"

"First rate. It's A 1."

Presently Dick turned pale, and his hand trembled a little.

Offering the pipe to his friend, he said:

"Have a pull?"

"No, thank you, not if I know it. I don't want my unfortunate stomach turned inside out," replied Messiter.

The pipe fell from Dick's hand and fell upon the grass.

"Oh, Harry," he said in a faint voice, "I feel so bad."

He leant back against the bank and his eyes closed.

Only those who remember the effects of the first pipe can really understand his feelings.

"What's the matter?" inquired Messiter, who was inclined to laugh.

"I don't know. I think I shall die. Oh, I wish I hadn't done it," groaned Dick.

"Get up and walk about."

"I couldn't move for a handful of tarts. What shall I do? Everything is turning round with me. It's awful."

"You would do it," said Messiter. "I'm so glad I didn't try."

Turning his head round, Dick was dreadfully sick for about five minutes.

"When you've done, you can call me. I shall take a look at the country," said Messiter.

"Don't leave me, Harry," moaned Dick: "I think I shall die."

"Carry me out and bury me decently," said Messiter, who could not help laughing.

Dick sank back again on the green sward, and breathed heavily.

For nearly an hour he did not move.

In vain Messiter tried to rouse him.

He only groaned.

At length the effect of the tobacco upon his untutored stomach wore off, and he began to

feel better, though being still very light-headed and dizzy.

"Can you walk now?" asked Messiter, glad to see him move.

"Yes, I think so, if you will give me your arm," answered Dick.

He got up, being very tottery on his legs, and leant upon Messiter.

"There is your pipe and pouch," said the latter.

"Don't mind them. I shall never do it again—never, never. What I've suffered, nobody knows."

"You'll remember your first pipe."

"Till I die," answered Dick.

The fresh breeze and the motion of walking braced him up a little, and he gradually got better.

As the feeling of sickness passed off, he grew stronger and his spirits came back.

"I should think," he remarked, "that if everybody has to go through what I've undergone, smoking isn't worth the misery it must take to acquire the art."

"You'll soon get used to it."

"I don't mean to try, and that's all about it. You've got the laugh of me, old man. Chaff away; I can't help it," Dick said, good-humoredly.

But Messiter was generous, and talked of other things, trying to make his friend forget all about it.

They had not gone far along the dyke before they sighted an encampment of gipsies.

"Gipsies!" exclaimed Messiter.

"I wonder if they would give me a drink of water or anything; let's go and ask them," said Dick. "My inside feels as if someone had been scraping it with an iron hoop, and then filled it up with hot cinders."

"Not a bad description," laughed Messiter.

The gipsies had spread their tents in a sheltered nook. The horses were grazing the short green grass; dogs and children gambled and played together. The men lounged about smoking their pipes, the very sight of which made Dick shudder; and the woman going in and out of the caravans, were making preparations for dinner, the materials of which simmered gently in a big iron pot, suspended from a tripod over the fire.

"Morning, gentlemen," said a dusky-skinned man.

"Same to you," replied Dick. "Can you give us a drink of something?"

"There's water, and we have some beer in a bottle. Take your choice. Which will you have?"

"The beer, I think. Malt is my tippie."

The gypsy brought a stone bottle out of a hole in the earth, where he had put it to keep it cool.

Pouring out some of its contents into a horn mug, he offered it to Dick, who drank eagerly, and instantly felt ten per cent better.

Giving the man a shilling for his timely civility, he sat down and watched the gypsies.

An elderly woman, determined to improve the occasion, came up and asked the boys to cross her hand with silver, and she would tell their fortunes.

"Go ahead, old girl," said Dick; "what am I to be—hung or drowned?"

The hag eagerly scanned the hand he extended to her.

"There is a break in the line of life," she answered, in strange, weird accents. "You are even now in danger. Beware, young man. If you have an enemy, keep a guard upon him. I see trouble ahead."

Just then the sun was obscured by a heavy, black cloud.

"It is an omen," continued the gypsy woman. "Your enemy is near you. Again I say, beware!"

Saying this, she let his hand fall, and walked rapidly away.

"That's a queer start," said Dick.

"Very," replied Messiter.

"Armond, I suppose."

"It must be Armond. I am too young to

have made many enemies. Armond is the only one I know of," Dick replied.

Messiter squeezed his friend's arm.

"There is Armond," he said.

"Where?"

"To the right. He has just come up, and is talking to that tall, villainous-looking gypsy."

"By Jove, you're right. It is funny that the woman should say my enemy was near, isn't it!" said Dick.

"Very," replied Messiter.

"Let's slope. I'm better now."

"All right."

Armond did not appear to take any notice of them as they walked away.

In fact, he was watching them closely.

Lowering his voice, he said to the gypsy, whose name was Romany Jack:

"Look at that boy—mark him well."

"Which?" said the gypsy. "There are two of them."

"The tall, bold-looking one. Do you see?"

"Yes."

"Would you know him again?" asked Armond.

"In a moment," asked Romany Jack; "when I see a face I never forget it."

"Good!" said Armond. "Step on one side, I want to speak privately to you."

Romany Jack walked by his side till they got away from the noise of the encampment, and then he stopped, facing Armond.

"Now, then, governor," he exclaimed, "what is it?"

Armond looked pale and nervous, and seemed to be collecting his thoughts, for he did not speak for fully a minute.

Adventures in Norway.

BY R. M. BALLANTYNE.

PART I.

HAPPENING to be in Norway just now, and believing that our young readers feel an interest in the land of the old Sea-kings, I give a short account of my experiences. Up to this date I verily believe that there is nothing in the wide world comparable to this island coast of Norway. At this moment we are steaming through a region which the fairies might rejoice to inhabit. Indeed, the fact that there are no fairies here goes far to prove that there are none anywhere. What a thought! No fairies? Why all the romance of childhood would be swept away at one fell blow if I were to admit the idea that there are no fairies. Perish the matter-of-fact thought! Let me rather conclude that, for some weighty though unknown reason, the fairies have resolved to leave this island-world uninhabited.

Fortune favors me. I have just come on deck, after a two day's voyage across the German Ocean, to find myself in the midst of innumerable islands, a dead calm—so dead, that it seems impossible that it should ever come alive again—and scenery so wild, so gorgeous, that one ceases to wonder where the Vikings of old got their fire, their romance, their enterprise, and their indomitable pluck. It is warm, too, and brilliantly sunny.

On gazing at these bald grey rocks, with the bright green patches here and there, and an occasional red tiled hut, one almost expects to see a fleet of daring rovers dash out of a sequestered bay, with their long yellow hair, and big blue eyes, and broad shoulders—not to mention broad-swords, and ring-mail, and battle-axes. But one does not always see what one expects. The days of the sea-kings are gone by; and at this moment, rowing out of one of these same sequestered bays, comes the boat of a custom-house officer! Yes, there is no doubt whatever about it. There he comes, a plain looking unromantic man in a foraging-

cap, with a blue surtout and brass buttons, about as like to a sea-king as a man-of-war is to a muffin.

Of course, the scenery is indescribable—no scenery is describable. In order that my reader may judge of the truth of this statement, I append the following description.

There are islands round us of every shape and size—all of them more or less barren, the greater part of their surfaces being exposed grey rock. Here and there may be seen, as I have already hinted, small patches of bright green, and, sparsely scattered everywhere are little red-roofed wooden cottages—poor enough things the most of them; others, gaudy-looking affairs with gable ends, white faces, and windows bordered with green. All of these are, while I write, reflected in the water as in a mirror, for there is not a breath of wind. Over the islands on my left are seen more islands extending out to sea. On the right tower up the blue hills of the interior of old Norway, and although the weather is excessively hot, many of these are covered with snow. Everything is light, and transparent and thin, and blue, and glassy, and fairy-like and magically beautiful, and altogether delightful! There; have you made much of all that? good reader. If you have, be thankful, for, as I set out by saying, description of scenery (at least to any good purpose) is impossible.

The description of a man, however, is quite another thing. Here is our pilot. He is a rugged man, with fair hair, and a yellow face, and a clay coloured chin, and a red nose. He is small in stature, and thin, insignificant in appearance, deeply miserable in aspect. His garments are black glazed oil-cloth from head to foot, and immensely too large for him, especially the vest, which is double-breasted and seems to think that the trousers are not a sufficient covering for such a pair of brittle-looking legs, for it extends at least half way down to his knees. The flap of his sou'-wester, also, comes half way down his back. He is a wonderful object to look upon; yet he has the audacity (so it seems to me) to take us in charge, and our captain has the foolhardiness to allow him.

If one goes out of the beaten track of "routes" in Norway one is apt to get into difficulties of a minor kind. I happen to be travelling just now with a party of four friends, of whom three are ladies, the fourth a jolly young fellow fresh from college. A few days ago we had a few unusual experiences—even for Norway. On leaving Bergen we had made up our minds, as the steamer did not sail to within about sixty miles of our destination, to get ourselves and our luggage put down at a small hamlet at the mouth of the Nord-fjord, and there engage two large boats to transport us the remaining sixty miles up the fjord.

The ladies of our party valorously resolved to sit up all night to see the magnificent island scenery through which we were passing under the influence of the charming and subdued daylight of midnight—for there is no night here just now.

As for myself, being an old traveller, I have become aware that sleep is essential to a comfortable and useful existence. I therefore bade my friends good-night, took a farewell look at the bright sky, and the islands, and the sleeping sea, and went below to bed.

Next day we spent steaming along the island coast.

At one o'clock on the following morning we reached Moldeoen, where the steamer landed us on a rock on which were a few acres of grass and a half-a-dozen wooden houses. We had a good deal of luggage with us, also some casks, cases, and barrels of provisions, and a piano-forte, as our place of sojourn is somewhat out of the way and far removed from civilized markets. A few poverty-stricken natives stood on the rude stone pier as we landed, and slowly assisted us to unload. At the time I conceived that the idiotical expression of their countenances was the result of being roused at untimely hours; but our subsequent experience led me to change my mind in regard to this.

PART II.

In half an hour the steamer puffed away into the mysterious depths of one of the dark-blue fjords, and we were left on a desolate island, like Robinson Crusoe, with our worldly goods around us. Most of the natives we found so stupid that they could not understand our excellent Norse! One fellow, in particular, might as well have been a piece of mahogany as a man. He stood looking at me with stolid imbecility while I was talking to him, and made no reply when I had done. In fact the motion of his eyes, as he looked at me, alone betrayed the fact that he was flesh and blood.

We soon found that two boats were not to be had; that almost all the men of the place were away deep-sea fishing, and would not be back for many hours, and that when they did come back they would be so tired as to require at least half-a-day's rest ere they could undertake so long a journey with us. However, they sent a man off in a boat to search for as many boatmen as could be found. He was away an hour. During this period the few inhabitants who had turned out to see the steamer disappeared, and we were left alone on the beach. There was no inn here; no one cared for us; every place seemed dirty, with the exception of one house, which had a very lonely and deserted aspect, so we did not venture to disturb it.

In the course of time the messenger returned. No men were to be found except three. This was not a sufficient crew for even one large boat—we required to man two.

A feeling that we were homeless wanderers came over us now, and each seating himself or herself on a box or a portmanteau, began to meditate. Seeing this, the three men coolly lay down to rest in the bow of their boat, and drawing a sail over them, were quickly sound asleep.

The act suggested the idea that we could not do better, and might do worse; we therefore placed two portmanteaus end to end, and thus made a couch about six feet long. A box, somewhat higher, placed at one end, served for a pillow, and on this one of the ladies lay down, flat on her back of course, that being the only possible position under the circumstances. A shawl was thrown over her, and she went to sleep like an effigy on a tombstone.

Another of the ladies tried a similar couch; but as boxes of equal height could not be found, her position was not enviable. The third lady preferred an uneasy posture among the ribs and cordage of the boat, and I lay down on the paving-stones of the quay, having found from experience that in the matter of beds flatness is the most indispensable of qualities, while hardness is not so awful as one might suppose. Where my comrade the collegian went to, I know not.

Presently one of the ladies got up and said that this would never do; that the next day was Sunday, and that we were in duty bound to do our best to reach the end of our journey on Saturday night. Thus admonished, my comrade and I started up and resolved to become "men," that is, to act as boatmen. No sooner said than done. We roused the three sleepers, embarked the most important half of our luggage; left the other half in charge of the native with the idiotic countenance, with directions to take care of it and have it forwarded as soon as possible, and, at a little after two in the morning, pulled vigorously away from the inhospitable shores of the Moldeoen.

We started on our sixty miles' journey hopefully, and went on our way for an hour or so with spirit. But when two hours had elapsed, my companion and I began to feel the effects of rowing with unaccustomed muscles rather severely, and gazed with envy at the three ladies who lay coiled up in an indescribable heap of shawls and crinolines in the stern of the boat sound asleep. They needed sleep, poor things, not having rested for two days and two nights.

But my comrade was more to be pitied than they. Having scorned to follow my example and take rest when he could get the chance, he now found himself unexpectedly called on to

do the work of a man when he could not keep his eyes open. When our third hour began, I saw that he was fast asleep at the oar—lifting it indeed and dropping it in proper time, but without pulling the weight of an ounce upon it. I therefore took it from him, and told him to take half-an-hour's nap, when I would wake him up, and expect him to take the pair of oars and give me a rest.

On being relieved he dropped his head on a sugar cask, and was sound asleep in two minutes!

I now felt drearily dismal. I began to realize the fact that we had actually pledged ourselves to work without intermission for the next eighteen or twenty hours, of which two only had run, and I felt sensations akin to what must have been those of the galley-slaves of old. In the midst of many deep thoughts and cogitations, during that silent morning hour, when all were asleep around me save the three mechanical looking boatmen, and when the only sounds that met my ears were the dip of the oars and the deep breathing (to give it no other name) of the slumberers—in the midst of many deep thoughts, I say, I came to the conclusion that in my present circumstances the worst thing I could do was to *think*! I remembered the fable of the pendulum that became so horrified at the thought of the ticks it had to perform in a lengthened period of time, that it stopped in despair; therefore I determined to "shut down" my intellect.

Soon after, my shoulders began to ache, and in process of time I felt a sensation about the small of my back that induced the alarming belief that the spinal marrow was boiling. Presently my wrists became cramped, and I felt a strong inclination to pitch the oars overboard, lie down in the bottom of the boat, and howl! But feeling that this would be unmanly, I restrained myself. Just then my companion in sorrow began to snore, so I awoke him, and—giving him the oars—went to sleep.

From this period everything in the history of that remarkable day became unconnected, hazy and confusing. I became to some extent mechanical in my thoughts and actions. I rowed and rested and rowed again; I ate, and sang, and even laughed. My comrade did the same, like a true Briton, for he was game to the back-bone. But the one great, grand, never-changing idea in the day was—pull—pull—pull!

We had hoped during the course of that day to procure assistance, but we were unsuccessful. We passed a number of fisherman's huts, but none of the men would consent to embark with us. At last, late that night, we reached a small farm about two-thirds the way up the fjord, where we succeeded in procuring another large boat with a crew of five men. Here, also, we obtained a cup of coffee; and while we were awaiting the arrival of the boat I lay down on the pier and had a short nap.

None but those who have toiled for it can fully appreciate the blessing of repose. It was a clear, calm night when we resumed our boat journey. The soft daylight threw a species of magical effect over the great mountains and the glassy fjord, as we rowed away with steady and vigorous strokes, and I lay down in the bow of the boat to sleep. The end of the mast squeezed my shoulder; the edge of a cask of beef, well-nigh stove in my ribs; the corner of a box bored a hole in the nape of my neck—yet I went off like one of the famed Seven Sleepers, and my friend, although stretched out beside me in similarly unpropitious circumstances, began to snore in less than five minutes after he lay down.

The last sounds I heard before falling into a state of oblivion were the voices of our fair companions joined in the most beautiful of our sacred melodies the "Evening Hymn," ere they lay down to rest in the stern of the boat. Next morning at nine we arrived at the top of the fjord, and at the end, for a time at least, of our journeying.

I RELATE what was a peculiar day in my experience of salmon-fishing in Norway.

The day was dull when I set out for the river, seven miles distant, in a small boat, with a Norseman. A seven miles' pull was not a good beginning, to a day's salmon-fishing, the weight of my rod being quite sufficient to try the arms without that; but there was no help for it. Arrived there I got a native, named Anders, to carry the bag and gaff.

Anders is a fair youth, with a mild countenance and a turned-up nose, addicted to going about with his mouth open.

"Good weather for fishing, Anders," said I, in Norse.

"Ya," said he "megit god" (very good).

This was the extent of our conversation at that time, for we came suddenly on the first pool in the river; and I soon perceived that although the weather was good enough, the river was so flooded as to be scarcely fishable.

And now began a series of petty misfortunes that gradually reduced me to a state of misery which was destined to continue throughout the greater part of the day. But Hope told me flattering tales—not to say *stories*—for a considerable time; and it was not until I had fished the third pool without seeing a fin, that my heart began fairly to sink. The day too, had changed from a cloudy to a rainy one, and Anders' nose began to droop, while his face elongated visibly.

Feeling much depressed, I sat down on a wet stone, in my wet garments, and lunched off a moist biscuit, a piece of tongue, and a rump of cheese. This was consoling, as far as it went, but it did not go far. The misty clouds obliterated the mountains, the rain drizzled from the skies, percolated through the brim of my hat, trinkled down my nose, and dropped upon my luncheon.

"Now we shall go up the river, Anders," said I.

Anders assented, as he would have done had I proposed going down the river, or across the river, or anywhere in the wide world, for, as I said it in English, he did not understand me. Evidently he did not care whether he understood me or not!

Up the river they went, to the best pool in it. The place was a torrent—unfishable—so deep that I could not wade in far enough to cast over the spot where fish are wont to lie. In making a desperate effort to get far in, I went over the boot tops, and my legs and feet, which had hitherto been dry, had immediate cause to sympathize with the rest of my person.

Anders's face became longer than ever. All the best pools in the river were tried, but without success, and at last, towards evening, we turned to retrace our steps down the valley. On the way I took another cast into the best pool—going deeper than the waist into the water in order to cast over the 'right spot.' The effort was rewarded. I hooked a fish and made for the bank as fast as possible. My legs were like solid pillars, or enormous sausages, by reason of the long boots being full to bursting with water. To walk was difficult, to run, in the event of the fish requiring me to do so, impossible. I therefore lay down on the bank and tossed both legs in the air to let the water run out—holding on to the fish the while. The water did run out—it did more; it ran right along my backbone to the nape of my neck, completing the saturation which the rain had hitherto failed to accomplish. But I had hooked a fish, and heeded it not.

He was a small one—only ten pounds; so we got him out quickly and without much trouble. Yet this is not always the case. Little fish are often the most obstreperous and the most troublesome. It was only last week that I hooked and landed a twenty-eight pound salmon, and he did not give me half the trouble that I experienced from one which I caught yesterday. Well, having bagged him, we proceeded on our homeward way, Anders's face shortening visibly and his nose rising, while

my own spirits began to improve. At another pool I tried again, and almost at the first cast hooked on an eighteen pounder, which Anders gaffed after about twenty minutes' play.

We felt quite jolly now, although it rained harder than ever, and we went on our way rejoicing—Anders's countenance reduced to its naturally short proportions.

Presently we came to an old weir—an erection for catching fish, as they ascend the river—where lay one of our favorite pools. The water was running down it like a mill-race. Pent up by the artificial dyke, the whole river in this place gushed down in a turbulent rapid. There was one comparatively smooth bit of water, which looked unpromising enough, but being in hopeful spirits now, I resolved on a final cast. About the third cast a small trout rose at the fly. The greedy little monsters have a tendency to do this. Many a small trout have I hooked with a salmon fly as large as its own head. Before I could draw the line to cast again, the usual heavy *wobble* of a salmon occurred near the fly. It was followed by the *whirr* of the reel as the line flew out like lightning, sawing right through the skin of my fingers (which by the way, are now so seamed and scarred that writing is neither so easy nor so pleasant as it used to be).

The burst that now ensued was sudden and tremendous! The salmon flashed across the pool, then up the pool, then down the pool. It was evidently bent on mischief. My heart misgave me, for the place was a bad one—all full of stumps and stones, with the furious rapid before mentioned just below, and the rough unsteady stones of the old dyke as an uncertain pathway to gallop over should the fish go down the river. I held on stoutly for a few seconds as he neared the head of the rapid, but there is a limit to the endurance of rods and tackle. What made the matter worse was that the dyke on which I stood terminated in a small island, to get from which to the shore necessitated swimming, and if he should go down the big rapid there was little chance of his stopping until he should reach the foot of it—far below this island.

All at once he turned tail and went down head-first. I let the line fly now, keeping my fingers well clear of it.

"He's off, Anders!" I shouted, as I took to my heels at full speed.

"Hurroo—hoo—oo!" yelled the Norseman, flying after me with the gaff.

How I managed to keep my footing in the rush over the broken dyke I know not. It is a marvel to me. The bushes on the island overhung the water, the earth having been cut away by the force of the rapid. I tried to pull up, because they were too thick to crash through; but the fish willed it otherwise. The line was getting low on the reel; the rod bent double; presently I had to straighten it out—in another moment I was in the water, over the boots, which filled, of course, in a moment. But this did not impede me as long as I was in deep water.

I was forsaken at this point by Anders, who sought and found a safe passage to the mainland, where he stood gazing at me with his eyes blazing and his mouth wide open.

I soon reached the end of the island, to my horror, for I had not previously taken particular note of the formation of the land there. A gulf of water of five or six yards broad of unknown depth lay between me and that shore, by which in the natural course of things I should have followed my fish as far as he chose. The rapid itself looked less tremendous than this deep black hole. I hesitated, but the salmon did not. Still down he went.

"Now then," thought I, "hole or rapid?"

The question was settled for me, for before I could decide, I was hauled into the rapid. No doubt I was a more than half-willing captive. Anyhow, willing or not willing, down I went. Ah! what a moment of ease and relief from exertion was that when I went a little deeper than the waist, and found myself

borne pleasantly along on tip-toe as light as one of those beautiful balls with which juveniles—in these highly favored days—are wont to sport in the fields!

And oh—ho—o! how my spirit seemed to gush out through my mouth and nose, or out at the top of my head, when the cold water encircled my neck as I lost my footing altogether, and struck out with my right hand, endeavoring the while to support my rod in the left!

I heard Anders's gasp at this point; but I saw him not. In another second my knees came into violent contact with a rock (alas! every motion of my body, as I now write, reminds me painfully of that crash!) Immediately after this I was sprawling up the bank, having handed the rod to Anders to hold, while I tossed my legs again in the air, to get rid of the water which weighed me down like lead. How earnestly I wished that I could tear these boots off and fling them away. But there was no time for that. On regaining my legs I seized the rod, and found that the salmon had brought up in an eddy created by the tail of a gravel-bank in the centre of the river between two rapids.

"Good," I gasped, blandly.

Anders smiled.

Presently I found that it was the reverse of good, for, when I tried to wind in the line and move the fish, I perceived that the resistance offered was not like that of a salmon, but a stump!

"I do believe he's gone!" I exclaimed.

Anders became grave.

"No fish there," said I gloomily.

Anders' face elongated.

"He has wound the line round a stump, and broken off," said I, in despair.

Woe, of the deepest profundity, was depicted on Anders' visage!

For full five minutes I tried every imaginable device, short of breaking the rod, to clear the line—in vain. Then I gave the rod to Anders to hold, and, taking the gaff with me, I went sulkily up the river, and again taking to the water, made my way to the head of the gravel bank over which I walked slowly, oppressed in spirit, and weighed down by those abominable boots which had once more filled to overflowing! Waterproof boots are worse than useless for this sort of work. But happily this is not the usual style of thing that one experiences in Norwegian fishing. It is only occasionally that one enjoys a treat of the kind.

In the middle of the gravel-bank the water was only three inches deep, so I lay down on my back and once again elevating my ponderous legs in the air, allowed a cataract of water to flow over me. Somewhat lightened, I advanced into the hole. It was deeper than I had expected, I was up to the middle in a moment, and sighed as I thought of the boots—full again! Before I reached the line the water was up to my shoulders; but it was the still water of the eddy. I soon caught the line and found that it was round a stump, as I had feared. With a heavy heart I eased it off—when lo! a tug sent an electric shock through my benumbed body, and I saw the salmon not three yards off, at the bottom of the pool! He also saw me, and, darting in terror from side to side, wound the line round me. I passed it over my head, however, and was about to let it go to allow Anders to tire out and finish the work, when the thought occurred that I might play it myself, by running the line through my fingers when he should pull and hauling in when he should stop. I tried this successfully. In half a minute more I drew him to within a yard of my side, gaffed him near the tail, and carried him up the gravel-bank under my arm.

He was not a large fish after all—only thirteen pounds. Nevertheless had he been fresh it would have been scarcely possible for me to me to hold his strong slippery body while standing in deep water. Even when exhausted he gave me much trouble. Gaining the shallowest part of the bank I fell on my

knees, crammed the fingers of my left hand into his mouth and gills, and held him down while I terminated his career with a stone. Thereafter I fixed the hook more securely in his jaw, and launching him into the rapid, left Anders to haul him out, while I made the best of my way to the shore.

This is about the roughest experience I have yet had of salmon fishing in Norway.

The season of this year bids fair to be a pretty good one. I have had about twelve days' fishing, and have caught sixteen fish, weighing together two hundred and seventy-six pounds, two of them being twenty-eight pounders.

Playing the Ghost.

GABRIEL SHOBE was seated astraddle of a log, at the end of which was a hollow stump, out of which he had just taken a gallon jug.

Extracting a corn cob from the mouth of the jug, he glued his lips to the orifice from whence the cob had been taken, elevated the jug, threw his head back, and, with his gaze directed heavenward, and his thoughts fixed on the cross-roads grocery from whence the nectar had been obtained, allowed a portion of the precious contents of the jug to gurgle down his throat.

Having reached the utmost limits of his internal arrangements for receiving and containing liquids, without, however, in the least appeasing his appetite, he lowered his jug, and, inserting the cob in the mouth, replaced it in the hollow stump, and, covering it with leaves, resumed his seat on the log, and soliloquised thusly:

"Ef Jim Peters thinks I'm gwine to let him and Suze marry he's mighty mistaken. I'd like to know how Bets and me and the children would git along without old Brindle. We'd starve; that's what we'd do."

Old Brindle, as Shobe called her, though she was only six years old, had, when a calf, been given to his daughter Susan by one of her uncles, with the express understanding that it was to be hers, and hers only, to do with as she pleased.

The calf had grown to be a fine cow, whose milk and butter formed about half the living of Shobe's family.

Jim Peters was a school-teacher, who divided his time about equally between teaching school, loafing around Bill Stickney's grocery, and hunting and fishing.

"The onery cuss," continued Shobe; "he's afraid to show his face in daylight, and so he comes a-sneakin' around in the night. 'Feard uv ghosts, too. Wish I had a lookin'-glass here to see what sort uv a ghost I'd make."

And picking up a sheet that he had brought with him, he wrapped it around him in the most approved ghost style.

"I guess I'll make a bully old ghost in the dark," said he; and, resuming his seat on the log in his ghostly attire, he awaited the approach of darkness, which was now near at hand.

The earth having at length donned its mantle of darkness, Shobe came to a perpendicular, remarking at the same time:

"I guess it's about time Jim wuz navigatin' along this way."

Starting for the road along which he expected Jim to "navigate," on reaching the stump in which his jug was hid, the temptation was too strong to resist; so reaching down, he drew it forth once more, remarking as he did so:

"I guess I'll have to give Sweet Lips another buss before I go;" and turning it up, took another hearty swig.

Returning it to its place of concealment, he resumed his ghostly march in the direction of the road.

Leaning his back against a tree that grew

near the road, or rather pathway, along which he expected his prospective, though undesired, son-in-law to pass, he waited with most exemplary patience the arrival of that interesting individual for the space of perhaps two minutes and a half.

At the end of that time his patience being nearly, and his legs quite, exhausted, he eased himself down to a sitting posture, his back being still against the tree, in which position he remained for another two minutes and a half, when his patience and backbone being both exhausted, his head dropped over to one side, his body in a state of limpness followed in the direction of the head, and the next moment Gabriel Shobe was reclining on the ground, from which, and immediately under him, some half-dozen short stubs projected.

Scarcely had he struck the ground when he was asleep, and snoring with an energy in striking contrast to that usually displayed by him in the ordinary avocations of life, the sound whereof could only be compared to the combined efforts of half a dozen hand-saws ripping their way crosswise through as many dry boards.

This music was not allowed to waste its sweetness on the desert air for many minutes before the footsteps of an approaching auditor were arrested by the sound.

"What's that?" whispered Jim Peters to himself, as he came to a sudden halt, while a creeping sensation pervaded his body.

Peering into the darkness, he discovered a white-looking object lying at the root of a tree some twenty yards in front of him, from which the sounds evidently emanated.

Spellbound, he stood rooted to the spot, his hair bristling, his flesh creeping, and his knees smiting together.

About this time the stubs on the points of

which Shobe was so gracefully though somewhat uncomfortably reclining, were beginning to give color to his dreams.

He dreamed that he was in the infernal regions, and while engaged in the discussion of some grave theological subject with his satanic majesty, a little demon came at him with a red-hot pitchfork.

Springing to his feet with an unearthly yell, that sundered the bonds of Jim Peters' enchantment and unrooted his feet from the ground, the terrified pedagogue wheeled to the right-about, and broke for home with the speed of the wind.

Shobe, smarting from the wounds of the imaginary pitchfork, and fearing another thrust, started full tilt in the same direction.

Catching sight of the sheet which, fastened around his neck, was streaming in the wind behind, and forgetful of the fact of his having arrayed himself as a ghost previous to his descent to the regions below, the apparition lent fear to the already terror-stricken Shobe, and he fairly flew.

Away went Peters, with an unearthly creature of some sort in his wake; and away went Shobe, with a legion of demons, as he imagined, in his rear.

Peters, in going down the slant of a hill, stubbed his toe, and, falling forward about twenty feet, fainted as he struck the ground.

Shobe, blowing like a porpoise, lumbered past with slightly diminished speed, but with fright aggravated, if possible, by the persistence of his imaginary pursuers.

Presently, his speed diminished to such a degree that the sheet, no longer retaining its horizontal position, caught on a limb of a fallen tree in such a way as not only to arrest his onward career, but to jerk him round with his face in the direction of his imaginary pursuers.

[THE END.]

On being thus brought face to face with the sheet, the recollection flashed upon his mind at once as to how it came to be attached to him, and the ludicrousness of the idea of his getting so badly scared at what he had intended to frighten another with, caused him to explode in a perfect volley of shouts of the most uproarious laughter.

Wrapping the sheet around him, he started homeward, and had proceeded but a short distance when Jim Peters, recovered from his swoon, hove in sight.

Catching sight of the ghostly-looking object approaching in the opposite direction, Peters took to the woods, when Shobe with a demoniac yell, ran after him. But while fear lent wings to Peter's heels, the want of that stimulus on Shobe's part enabled the frightened pedagogue to distance his pursuer, who presently gave up the chase and went home, not forgetting to visit the hollow stump on the way, in order to satisfy himself that the jug had not been disturbed in his absence.

Sunrise next morning found Peter with his worldly possessions done up in a handkerchief, wending his way in the direction of the setting sun.

The most authentic accounts we have of him since then are to the effect that, after serving a session in the Legislature in one of the western states, he was sent to the penitentiary for stealing horses.

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